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*Ruth
in a Rush
by
Lindsey Barbee*

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T. S. Denison & Company, Publishers

154 West Randolph Street

CHICAGO

RUTH IN A RUSH

A Comedy in Three Acts

BY

LINDSEY BARBEE

AUTHOR OF

*"After the Game," "At the End of the Rainbow,"
"The Call of the Colors," "The Call of Wohelo,"
"The Dream that Came True," "The Fifteenth of
January," "Then Greek Met Greek," "Her First
Scoop," "The Kingdom of Heart's Content," "The
Real Thing After All," "Sing a Song of Seniors,"
"The Spell of the Image," "The Thread of
Destiny," "Tomorrow at Ten," "The Trial of
Hearts," "A Watch, a Wallet and a Jack of
Spades," "When the Clock Strikes Twelve," "The
Whole Truth," "In the College Days," "Let's
Pretend—A Book of Children's Plays," etc.*



CHICAGO
T. S. DENISON & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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DEC -3 1919

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LINDSEY BARBEE

COLD 53245

RUTH IN A RUSH

FOR FIVE MEN AND SEVEN WOMEN

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(*Named in order of appearance*)

MRS. BROWNELL	<i>Ruth's Aunt</i>
JULIET RAYMOND	<i>Ruth's Secretary and Friend</i>
RUTH MACDONALD MOORE	<i>Always in a Rush</i>
SUSIE	<i>A Maid</i>
LEONARD BRUCE	<i>Poor but Aristocratic</i>
WAYNE ASHLEY	<i>Rich but Uncultured</i>
DWIGHT LAMBERT	<i>An Eloper</i>
PEGGY PATTON	<i>Another Eloper</i>
GILBERT LANSING	<i>A Writer</i>
PHILIP GRANT	<i>A Millionaire</i>
SADIE SODASTROM	<i>A Ticket Agent</i>
JEAN MOORE FOSTER	<i>Ruth's Sister</i>

TIME — *The Present.*

PLACE — *An Eastern City.*

TIME OF PLAYING — *Two Hours and Thirty Minutes.*

ACT I — Room in Ruth Moore's residence. An August afternoon.

ACT II — Waiting room at Sunshine Junction. A few days later.

ACT III — The same. A few hours later.

STORY OF THE PLAY

Ruth Moore, a maid of manifold interests and of manifold dollars, finds herself avalanched not only by the aforesaid over-abundance but by a pair of persistent suitors. Physically weary, distracted by social demands, and eager to have some definite work and to be economically worth while, she contrives to obtain — under an assumed name — the position of secretary to Gilbert Lansing, a well-known editor and writer. For this arduous task Ruth has been trained by her own secretary, Juliet Raymond, who is a college mate and an intimate friend. The fact that Ruth has literary ambitions, a fair amount of talent and has had a manuscript caustically criticized and rejected by this same Gilbert Lansing, makes her doubly eager to accept the position, since she hopes in this way to gain practical benefit from association — although he is represented as old, over-bearing and sarcastic. Meanwhile, an older married sister whose summer home is at no great distance and who is frankly desirous of finding an eligible *parti* for the capricious Ruth, bids the girls come for a visit in order to meet two friends of her husband, whom she does not name but who are represented one as distinguished and the other as a millionaire. Ruth understands that once more Jean is setting the stage for a possible love story; nevertheless she plans to go before she enters upon her new duties.

At Sunshine Junction where the local train to Willowdene connects with the city train, Ruth and Juliet meet Gilbert Lansing and Philip Grant, who have been motoring to Willowdene and who have been forced on account of lack of gasoline to wait for the local. Eliminating conventionality, the four, without revealing

their names, become acquainted, enjoy a primitive afternoon tea and are interrupted by Peggy Pat and Dwight who are eloping, pursued by an angry parent who telephones to the station in order to intercept the culprits. In an impulsive effort to help out, Ruth and Lansing assume the rôle of bride and groom; and, under cover of this pretence, the real culprits escape, leaving their rescuers forcibly detained in the station.

Identities are finally discovered, difficulties are straightened out, and Ruth becomes permanent secretary to the celebrity.

SYNOPSIS FOR PROGRAM

ACT. I. Ruth in a rush — to obtain a secretary's position. However, she finds time to shock an ambitious aunt, to accept a week-end invitation, to dismiss two persistent suitors and to advise a prospective bride and groom.

ACT. II. Ruth in a rush — for a train. However, fate decrees that she and Juliet share the waiting room with two fellow travelers, which results in a delightful confusion of identities, elopers and lunatics.

ACT. III. Ruth in a rush — for the border line.

COSTUMES AND CHARACTERISTICS

MRS. BROWNELL — A middle-aged matron whose dignity of manner and modishness of dress marks her as a grande dame.

JULIET — An attractive young woman of great poise and vivacity, whose pretty summer frock is the essence of daintiness. In Act II, she wears a tailored suit and hat.

RUTH — A young woman of winsome personality and distinct individuality. Wears a fluffy summer gown in Act I. Tailored suit and hat in Act II.

SUSIE — The coquettish type and is most attractive in her conventional black gown with its sheer white apron; its white collar and cuffs and its dainty cap.

BRUCE — A rather pompous and important young man, who in his immaculate summer flannels, radiates conventionality and self-esteem.

ASHLEY — Approaching middle age and wears a correct tailored business suit. But a closer inspection shows that his tie is a little too gaudy, his scarf-pin a wee bit blatant and his ring a trifle conspicuous.

LAMBERT — Resplendent in white suit, shoes and pana-ma. The irresponsible, irrepressible college type in I. Attired in a light summer suit, long motor coat and motor cap in II.

PEGGY PAT — The sweetest kind of a maiden, attired in a dainty beruffled summer gown, crowned with a large flower-laden hat and carrying a distractingly gay parasol in I. Her dainty summer gown is bedraggled and a long dark coat has not wholly protected her from the storm in II.

LANSING — About 32. Hair at the temples is slightly touched with gray. Impresses one with a quiet dignity. Has a keen sense of humor coupled with an adaptability and a certain charm of manner which gives him a distinct personality.

GRANT — About 32. Is polished, a bit languid, a trifle bored and quite the cosmopolitan.

SADIE — Business-like and of an inquisitive type. In her air and attire there is an imitation of city ways and city fashions. Her hair is in the approved

style. Her plain gingham gown is trim and neat and relieved by white collar and cuffs but her dangling ear-rings give an unexpected and rather *outré* finish to her appearance.

JEAN — Wears a long motor coat over an elaborate dinner gown and is shrouded in a motor veil. Attractive personality. Fashionable in the extreme.

LIST OF PROPERTIES

ACT I

Settee with cushions.

Table with bookrack, books, lamp, vase and paper knife.

Desk with electrolier, telephone, desk set and large envelope.

Desk chair.

Typewriter stand and chair.

Manuscript.

Large chair and hassock.

Portieres, window draperies, rugs, pictures, etc.

Push button.

Table, two chairs and awning for porch.

Lorgnette for MRS. BROWNELL.

Book for JULIET.

Basket of flowers for RUTH.

Box of flowers, note, card tray, tray of lemonade and glasses, three letters and telegram for SUSIE.

Parasol for PEGGY PAT.

ACT II

Two long seats or benches.

Stove (flat top with lid).

Box of kindling wood.

Water cooler.

Map and calendar.

Telephone bell and telegraph instrument off stage; also train bell and whistle.

Newspapers, suit case, cigarette, matches, small parcel of tea, lemon, cheese and watch for GRANT. Suit case, money, newspapers, matches and knife for LANSING.

Tickets, money, handcuffs for SADIE.

Umbrella, traveling bag containing large tin box of marshmallows, paper drinking cups and magazines for RUTH.

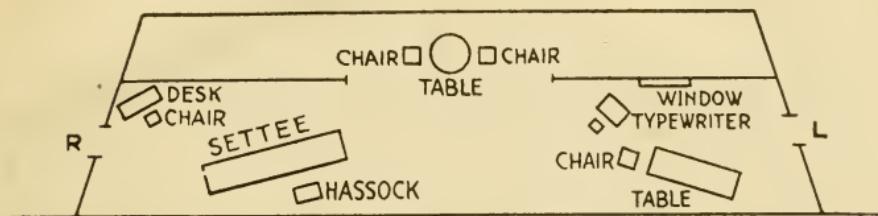
Traveling bag containing curling tongs; wrist watch, small parcel of sugar, box of crackers and handkerchief for JULIET.

ACT III

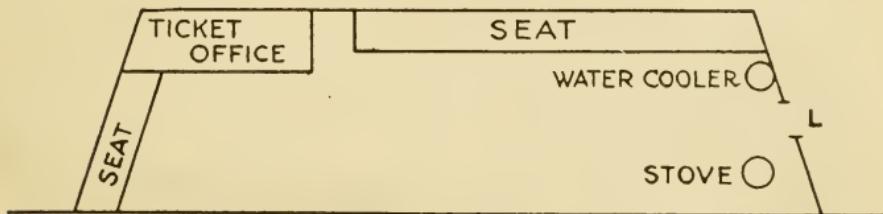
Handcuff's for SADIE.

SCENE PLOT

ACT I



ACTS II and III



STAGE DIRECTIONS

R. means right of stage; *C.*, center; *R. C.*, right center; *L.*, left; *1 E.*, first entrance; *U. E.*, upper entrance; *R. 3 E.*, right entrance, up stage; *D. F.*, door in flat, or scene running across the back of the stage, etc.; up stage, away from footlights; down stage, near footlights. The actor is supposed to be facing the audience.

RUTH IN A RUSH

THE FIRST ACT

SCENE: *A bright, charming room in RUTH MOORE's residence — just the sort of a room that possesses an atmosphere of its own. The few good pictures, the rugs, the books denote culture and refinement; and the wicker furniture with its gay chintz cushions gives tone and color. At C. in F. wide-flung French windows reveal a shady porch with green and white awning, on which is a small white wicker table with a chair on either side. Doors with chintz portières down R. and L. lead to the back and to the front of the house, respectively; and, left of the porch opening, is a small window with chintz draperies. Near this window is a stand with a typewriter — and on the stand is a freshly typed manuscript. Right of the French window, placed across R. U. E., is a pretty desk with desk set, electrolier, telephone and desk chair. Down R. is a long settee with cushions and hassock; and down L., a table which bears book rack, lamp, vase and paper knife. Right of the table is a large and comfortable chair.*

The curtain rises upon JULIET curled up on the settee, reading, and MRS. BROWNELL, standing by typewriter, examining the manuscript. JULIET is an attractive young woman of great poise and vivacity, whose pretty summer frock is the essence of daintiness. MRS. BROWNELL is a middle-aged matron whose dignity of manner and modishness of dress marks her as a grande dame. A frequently-used lorgnette adds impressiveness to her bearing.

MRS. B. (*sharply*). Juliet?

JULIET (*closing her book*). Yes, Mrs. Brownell.

MRS. B. What does Ruth mean by all this foolishness?

JULIET. I don't believe I understand.

MRS. B. Well — *you* know — and *I* know — that a typewriter does not belong in this room.

JULIET (*rising and crossing to Mrs. Brownell*). It's here — just temporarily. Ruth was anxious to finish her manuscript and thought it cooler and pleasanter to do the work in this room. (*Glances around.*) It *is* pleasanter:

MRS. B. (*tapping manuscript with lorgnette*). What *is* the manuscript?

JULIET. A charming little story destined to captivate the fancy of some editor.

MRS. B. Nonsense. It will come back just as fast as the others have come. (*Throws manuscript upon stand.*)

JULIET. I'd rather believe that — this time — it will wing its way straight to the proper market.

MRS. B. (*crossing to settee*). Why does Ruth waste her time on this sort of thing?

JULIET (*following*). Waste her time?

MRS. B. When she might be making the most of her opportunities? (*Sits.*)

JULIET. Isn't that just what she *is* doing? (*Sits on arm of chair, right of table.*)

MRS. B. That depends upon what one calls opportunities. With her fortune she might be a central figure in the social world, but instead of having a few jewels to merit comment — and a wardrobe of dashing costumes — and a few good-looking cars —

JULIET (*interrupting*). She chooses to spend it on

books, pictures and travel. (*Lightly.*) Each one to her own taste, you know.

MRS. B. And you happen to have the same ridiculous ideas in regard to the use of money, Juliet. Sometimes I think you have influenced Ruth.

JULIET (*laughingly*). It's very flattering to think that I'm as important as that — but, even if I am Ruth's best friend — her ideas are her own.

MRS. B. You evolved these theories when you were college girls together.

JULIET. But *then* I had the right to evolve theories — for money wasn't an abstract thing to me. (*Rises.*) Now — I am merely Miss Moore's private secretary — and am not in a position to advise. (*Stands back of chair.*)

MRS. B. Don't talk foolishness, Juliet. Your social status is quite the same.

JULIET. With the right people — yes.

MRS. B. And you certainly have been of inestimable value to Ruth.

JULIET. I hope I have. Otherwise, I should feel quite guilty over the generous check which rewards my services.

MRS. B. How could she have managed her avalanche of work without your assistance?

JULIET. She couldn't. (*Crosses to settee and sits at MRS. BROWNELL's left.*)

MRS. B. Or superintended the thousand and one charities in which she is interested?

JULIET. Nobody can attempt the impossible — and put it over — without help.

MRS. B. Attempt the impossible! That describes Ruth's attitude towards things in general.

JULIET. I'm afraid it does. For if she has one fault in the world — it's being in a rush.

MRS. B. (*sighing*). Ruth in a rush! It grows very, very tiresome.

JULIET. And very interesting. For you must admit that the rush is in behalf of the best things.

MRS. B. I'm not so sure of that — for man seems to be eliminated from her program.

JULIET. Why shouldn't he be? I said — the *best* things.

MRS. B. There you go, Juliet — maligning the opposite sex!

JULIET. I'm not maligning.

MRS. B. It's the same thing. What's more, Ruth shares your views.

JULIET. I share *her* views, you mean. Ruth's opinions are not colored by those of anybody else.

MRS. B. It's not natural for a girl to dislike men.

JULIET. Ruth doesn't dislike men.

MRS. B. It's not politic to avoid them.

JULIET. But she doesn't avoid them.

MRS. B. Then will you tell me why she assumes such an indifferent attitude?

JULIET. She simply hasn't time for them — that's all.

MRS. B. A fine distinction!

JULIET. But a real one just the same.

MRS. B. Naturally, I have a keen responsibility in regard to Ruth's future — and I shall never feel satisfied until she contracts a suitable marriage.

JULIET. But she has plenty of time for — that.

MRS. B. I'm not so sure. Ruth isn't so young as she once was.

JULIET (*laughingly*). Hush! For I'm the same age, exactly.

MRS. B. Then it's high time that both of you were coming to your senses.

JULIET (*after a pause*). Ruth can never abide by the same schedule which proved satisfactory for her sister.

MRS. B. Unfortunately. Jean was wholly docile and I had no trouble whatever in persuading her to make a proper bow to society and to marry the proper man. As Mrs. Foster she is just what she was destined to be — a popular young matron in a very exclusive set.

JULIET (*rising*). But not a bit different from ten million other young matrons.

MRS. B. Why should she be different?

JULIET. Don't you realize that Ruth isn't that type of a girl? (*Crosses to table and places book in book-rack.*)

MRS. B. At the present moment I realize nothing but the fact that she needs to settle down and find a husband.

JULIET (*turning and leaning upon table*). Ruth will never settle down *that way*. And as to the husband — well, he'll be obliged to sweep her off her feet before she knows it — if he wishes to win her heart.

MRS. B. Nonsense! Self respecting husbands don't do that sort of thing.

JULIET. But Ruth's husband must be a wee bit different.

MRS. B. *Different?* Who ever heard of a different husband! They're all alike — just as alike as two peas in a pod.

JULIET. I don't believe it.

MRS. B. Then marry and find out.

JULIET. If every husband is like every other husband, why in the world should a girl want — everybody's husband?

MRS. B. I don't know why — but she does.

RUTH enters from porch. *She wears a fluffy summer gown, carries a basket of garden flowers, and impresses you at once as a young woman of winsome personality and distinct individuality. As the play goes on, you will note her keen sense of humor, her quickness, her independence and her loveliness.*

JULIET (*emphatically*). Well, *this* one doesn't — and she never has — and she never will!

RUTH (*at porch door*). Good gracious! What inspired this Declaration of Independence?

JULIET. It isn't a Declaration of Independence. It's an Emancipation Proclamation.

RUTH. Emancipation — from what?

JULIET (*meeting her at C.*). Husbands!

RUTH (*reprovingly*). Aunt Jessica, you've been at it again. (*Comes to back of settee as telephone rings*). Won't you place these in the vase for me? (*Goes to desk and seats herself*. MRS. BROWNELL crosses to table, arranges flowers in vase and, later on, gives basket to SUSIE to carry out.)

Enter SUSIE from L. with box of flowers and note. She is of the coquettish type and is most attractive in her conventional black gown with its sheer white apron, its white collar and cuffs and its dainty cap.

SUSIE (*at C.*). Flowers, Miss Ruth.

RUTH (*indifferently*). Lay them down, Susie. (*SUSIE lays box on table*.)

SUSIE. But there's a note —

RUTH. Lay that down, too.

SUSIE. And the messenger is waiting for an answer.
(*Lays note on table.*)

RUTH (*taking up the receiver*). Oh, bother! (To JULIET.) Open the note, Jule. (*Into telephone.*) Yes? This is Miss Moore. Yes, Mr. Ashley. I recognize your voice. (*Placing hand over receiver as JULIET opens note.*) Leonard Bruce I suppose?

JULIET (*glancing over note*). Yes. He wants to call this afternoon.

RUTH (*into telephone*). What is that? Oh, I recognize *anybody's* voice — it's quite a gift. (To SUSIE.) Send word that I shall expect him.

JULIET. Oh, Ruth — how horrid to answer verbally. (To SUSIE.) Wait — I'll write a note. (*Crosses to desk.*)

RUTH (*into telephone*). Pardon me — I didn't get your last sentence. Yes, I'll be home all afternoon. Oh, any time. Very well. Goodbye. (*Slams receiver on hook.*) There! (*Rises and crosses to C. JULIET immediately seats herself at desk and begins to write.*)

MRS. B. (*taking box from table*). Shall I open the box?

RUTH. Please don't. The sight of another orchid would prove my undoing.

MRS. B. But you don't know that they're orchids.

RUTH. Oh, but I do know. They've been orchids every time — and the man couldn't think up a new flower if he tried.

MRS. B. (*severely*). Almost any girl would be flattered by his choice. An orchid is surely the most cultivated product of the conservatory —

RUTH. And thrives upon hot air. Well, so does he.

JULIET (*rising and coming to C.*). Here's the note for the messenger, Susie.

SUSIE (*as she takes the note*). Yes, Miss Juliet.
(*Starts to go.*)

RUTH. And Susie?

SUSIE. Yes, Miss Ruth.

RUTH. Do you happen to be attending anything of a social nature tonight?

SUSIE. A dance, Miss Ruth.

RUTH. Then orchids will be the very thing. (*Takes box from MRS. B. and thrusts it into SUSIE's hands.*)

SUSIE. Oh, Miss Ruth — I can't —

RUTH. You must —

SUSIE. But —

RUTH. If your lover has already sent you flowers, present this corsage effect to the chaperon. It will make a hit. (*As SUSIE protests.*) Not a word — (*pushes her*) — hurry. (*Exit SUSIE at L.*)

MRS. B. That's hardly fair to Mr. Bruce, Ruth.
(*Sits right of table.*)

RUTH. He'll never know. (*Sits on left arm of settee.*)

JULIET (*leaning over back of settee*). Oh, won't he? Why, he'll look for those flowers the very first thing.

RUTH. Not when he can look at *me*, my dear.

MRS. B. (*eagerly*). Ruth — do you mean that —

RUTH. Don't get excited, Aunt Jessica. I mean that Leonard Bruce has eyes only for the dollar sign — and that's what I am to him — a nice, animated dollar sign.

MRS. B. You're not kind, Ruth. His family traditions —

RUTH (*interrupting*). I'm not fond enough of family traditions to give them financial backing.

JULIET. Then why encourage him by allowing him to call this afternoon?

RUTH. *That*, Juliet — is my own deep, dark secret.

MRS. B. (*pettishly*). Ruth! I won't permit you to make that man the victim of any practical joke.

RUTH. There's safety in numbers. You forget that I've just asked Wayne Ashley to join the party.

JULIET. Well, surely *he* isn't after your money.

RUTH. Hardly. His bank account is even more substantial than my own.

MRS. B. Then in what respect is *he* lacking?

RUTH. Family traditions — and social position.

JULIET. And he expects you to supply both?

RUTH. Exactly. Naturally, I resent the job of Universal Supply Depot.

MRS. B. You're too ridiculously particular, Ruth. This attitude will never get you anywhere.

RUTH. By *anywhere* meaning — matrimony?

MRS. B. Well, yes. Matrimony.

RUTH (*airily*). Matrimony, my dear aunt, is only a sub-station in my main line of travel. And I haven't time even to stop off.

MRS. B. Not everybody can arrange the train schedule.

RUTH. Well, not everybody is in such a rush as I.

MRS. B. Fortunately.

RUTH. Perhaps so. But you see, auntie dear, I'm not so interested in the traveling as in the arriving. (*Rises and crosses to typewriter.*)

MRS. B. *Arriving?*

RUTH (*waving manuscript*). Have you seen this?

MRS. B. (*turning head*). Oh, *that's* what you mean! Well, even a rush won't insure a literary arrival.

RUTH. Have you looked — *carefully* — at this?

MRS. B. Why should I? It's probably just like a score of others.

RUTH. But, Aunt Jessica — the typing! (*Leans over back of Mrs. Brownell's chair*.)

MRS. B. (*glancing carelessly at manuscript*). Oh — the typing is good enough.

RUTH. *Good enough!* It's perfect — and I did it all by myself.

MRS. B. (*impatiently*). Why do you spend your time at the typewriter —

RUTH. When Jule can do it for me? Simply because I do it just as well as Jule.

JULIET. Better.

RUTH. Modesty forbade me to say *that*, of course.

JULIET. You see, Mrs. Brownell, I've been teaching Ruth all I know — and the pupil has outstripped the teacher.

RUTH (*gaily*). You should just watch me take Jule's dictation! And as to typing — positively, I've reached the speed limit.

MRS. B. But what good will it do you? And why do you waste your time when —

RUTH. I might be doing social stunts? (*Hesitates.*)

MRS. B. Well?

RUTH. Because — now, auntie, I warn you — you're in for a shock —

MRS. B. (*coldly*). Go on.

RUTH. Because I am fitting myself for somebody's secretary.

MRS. B. (*after a pause*). I don't believe I under-

stood you, Ruth. In fact, I'm quite sure I didn't understand you.

RUTH. Oh, yes, you did, Aunt Jessica.

MRS. B. *Somebody's secretary!*

RUTH. Exactly. (*Sits on arm of Mrs. Brownell's chair.*)

MRS. B. It's preposterous!

RUTH. It's fun. I'm going to be like real people — I intend to have my chance — and what's more, I'm determined to make a success of it.

MRS. B. You're crazy — downright crazy.

RUTH. Oh, no, I'm not. On the contrary, I've just come to my senses.

MRS. B. I've been exceedingly patient with you, Ruth, and you've been very trying in many ways. But this is too much — and you shall not do it!

RUTH. Too late, auntie. I've already applied for a position.

MRS. B. (*with an effort*). Who — is — the — man?

RUTH. You sound just like the ghost in Hamlet.

MRS. B. Don't evade my question.

RUTH. I'm not evading it — for I don't know the man as yet. You see, I haven't quite landed my job.

MRS. B. (*shuddering*). Don't express yourself in that ordinary way. (*Pauses.*) To whom have you applied?

RUTH. To Gilbert Lansing.

MRS. B. And *who* is Gilbert Lansing?

RUTH. Auntie, if you weren't so funny I'd lecture you severely upon your ignorance. Not to know Gilbert Lansing argues yourself unknown.

MRS. B. I never heard of him.

RUTH. Then don't tell it to anybody else. He is

the author of the great book of the year — and he is also editor of the Pacific Weekly.

MRS. B. Disgusting!

RUTH. To be editor of the Pacific Weekly? Oh, auntie!

MRS. B. To imagine that a big man could possibly need *your* services! (*JULIET crosses back to settee and seats herself down stage on hassock.*)

RUTH. Oh, I'm wonderfully recommended. Jule saw to that.

MRS. B. And how do you know he wants a secretary?

RUTH. Jule has a friend who is a go-between.

MRS. B. (*abruptly*). Is he young?

RUTH. Who — the friend? He's a she.

MRS. B. You know who I mean. This Gilbert Lansing.

RUTH. We've heard that he is old — and sarcastic — and very disagreeable.

MRS. B. Then why on earth should you want to go to him?

RUTH. Auntie, you're so trying! One moment you are afraid that he *is* young — and the next you are cross because he isn't!

MRS. B. Why did you choose — *him*?

RUTH. Because he is a literary light — and any association with a literary light must necessarily be of great benefit to me in my work.

MRS. B. (*scornfully*). Do you think you can write?

RUTH. I intend to try. (*Rises and walks to back of settee.*)

MRS. B. Where does this — creature — live?

RUTH. In Kensington. So I won't be far away. Juliet and I have already selected our apartment.

MRS. B. *Juliet?*

RUTH. Of course. She is to help me out in my dual personality.

MRS. B. What do you mean?

RUTH. That to my future employer I shall be only Ruth MacDonald, the model secretary—not Ruth Moore, the dollar sign.

MRS. B. It is a comfort to know that there will be some disguise. (*Suddenly.*) But, of course, there's the chance that he won't want you.

RUTH. Then somebody else *will*. For I'm pledged to a life of usefulness. (*Coaxingly.*) Come now, Aunt Jessica, be a sport and wish me luck.

MRS. B. I'll wish you nothing of the sort. You're a great trial, Ruth—a great disappointment—and from this time on, I shall not interest myself in your career. (*Rises and crosses to back of stage.*) You have splendid opportunities—you choose to ignore them—so, watch out. On your main line of travel, as you are pleased to call it, there may be such a thing as—a wreck! (*Flounces angrily out at L.*)

RUTH (*after a pause*). Dear me! Even my feeble intelligence grasps the fact that she is—provoked.

JULIET. Why shouldn't she be? She had made other plans for you—and you *are* a bit irritating at times, Ruth.

RUTH. *Et tu, Brute!* (*Sits right of table.*)

JULIET. She had visions of you as a social success.

RUTH. But I'll be some other kind of a success.

JULIET. You don't know that you will.

RUTH. And some day my name will be—oh, just a little famous!

JULIET. Don't be too sure.

RUTH. And all my loving family will be pretty glad that I was not checked in my chosen career.

JULIET. You're imagining things.

RUTH. Cassandra is your middle name, isn't it? (*Holds up the manuscript.*) Well — what do you think of it?

JULIET. It's the best thing you've done, — just because it's human.

RUTH. What do you mean by — human?

JULIET. Well — for one thing — what happened to your heroine might have happened to any one of us; and we in turn might have talked and thought and acted just as she did.

RUTH (*eagerly*). Yes?

JULIET. And you've taken everyday people and everyday events and everyday feelings — things that we all appreciate. Of course I don't know the technique of writing, Ruth, but it seems to me that one's power lies in perfect understanding of one's subject.

RUTH. That's what Gilbert Lansing says. (*Calmly.*) I hate that man.

JULIET. You have no right to hate him.

RUTH. Oh, *haven't* I? Didn't I meekly ask him for a little note of criticism when I submitted my manuscript — and didn't he respond with a perfect volley of horrid, sarcastic remarks about my characters and my style and my philosophy?

JULIET. You asked him for criticism, didn't you?

RUTH. But I didn't expect it.

JULIET. Not many editors would have taken the time and the trouble for a personal note. You should be grateful for the distinction.

RUTH. But I don't see everything from his viewpoint?

JULIET. Just what *is* his viewpoint?

RUTH. Wait—I'll get the letter. (*Runs to desk and returns with large envelope.*) First, he maligns my heroine. (*Takes letter from envelope and sits on settee.*)

JULIET. If I remember correctly, she *was* a bit queer—not exactly in our set. (*Rises and sits by RUTH.*)

RUTH. Listen. (*Reads.*) Leona is unequalled—not only in literature but in real life. Not on land and not on sea could one find her prototype. You have succeeded in perpetrating a character who, psychologically and otherwise, defies every trait attributed to charming femininity. (*Puts down letter.*) Now, what do you call that?

JULIET. I call it howlingly funny.

RUTH. I call it—impudent. Again—(*reads.*) Don't describe your heroine as a mystery to every woman. My dear young lady—now, Jule, how did he know *that* when I signed a man's name—John Chester—to the story?

JULIET (*laughing*). Give it up.

RUTH (*continuing the letter*). My dear young lady, don't you know that a woman may be a mystery to a man but never to another woman? (*Puts down letter.*) Horrid old man—I don't suppose he knows one thing about the opposite sex.

JULIET. Did your hero escape?

RUTH. *Escape?* With a noose around his neck. Listen to this. (*Reads.*) Give Horace some distinguishing characteristic. As you have delineated him, he might be a United States senator, a patent medicine barker or the floor walker at some department store.

(*Angrily.*) As I said before, Juliet, I hate Gilbert Lansing.

JULIET. Anything else?

RUTH. *Anything else?* The fabric of my manuscript is but a torn and tattered thing. Give ear to this advice concerning my villain. (*Reads.*) Don't restore Hugo's wife at the sacrifice of his fortune. The average man would rather lose a dozen wives than a dozen dollars. (*Puts down letter.*) Juliet, that man has been disappointed in love — he's a woman hater.

JULIET. He's delicious.

RUTH. And this (*continuing to read*). Don't let the mother spout maxims and apothegms to the maid. The servant problem is bad enough as it is. (*Sarcastically.*) That's a feeble attempt to be funny.

JULIET. There's nothing feeble about *that* man, Ruth.

RUTH. And in regard to my ending — Jule, you remember my ending, don't you? Tragic, gruesome, and the heroine plunging from a precipice into the dashing waves? Well — hear the censor — (*Reads.*) The average reader doesn't care what happens to the hero, and the heroine just so long as they are clasped in each other's arms when the story ends. In popular literature only villains die — and unfortunate husbands whose wives are in love with other men. Otherwise, it's hard upon digestion.

JULIET. I think he rather enjoyed writing that criticism, Ruth.

RUTH. Oh, *do* you? Well, I didn't enjoy reading it. Just wait until I get a chance at him.

JULIET. You may not have the opportunity. Remember that he hasn't engaged you — yet —

RUTH. But if he does —

JULIET. You must also remember that he is an old man — and be accordingly deferential.

Enter SUSIE from L.

SUSIE (*crossing to RUTH*). The mail, Miss Ruth.

RUTH (*as she takes letters from tray*). Thank you, Susie. (*As SUSIE turns.*) And Susie —

SUSIE. Yes, Miss Ruth?

RUTH. Bring some lemonade to the porch table. We expect callers later on. (*Exit SUSIE at R.*) Two letters for you, Jule — (*hands them to her*) and one for me, postmarked Willowdene. (*Crosses to table, takes her paper knife and returns to former position.*)

JULIET. Jean chose a pretty station name for her summer home.

RUTH (*slitting the envelope*). Willowdene *is* a pretty name — and a pretty place — but it is frightfully inconvenient. (*Gives knife to JULIET.*)

JULIET. Why so? (*Opens her letters.*)

RUTH. The roads for motoring are bad — and anyway it's too far. Then if you go by train, there's a ridiculous little station where you wait hours in order to connect with a local. And half the time the local is late — so there's no definite schedule to rely upon.

JULIET. That does make a difference. (*Glances at her letters.*)

RUTH (*as she opens her letter*). The usual brief epistle, I see. Jean is always so busy with maids and babies and sewing and house-parties that she hasn't time to send a real letter to her family. Always in a rush.

JULIET. Well — *you're* always in a rush.

RUTH. But mine is a different sort of rush. To fol-

low the mechanism of Jean's domestic machinery is like watching a three-ringed circus.

JULIET. She probably thinks your routine just as nerve racking.

RUTH. Doubtless. (*Silence for a few moments as each reads her mail.*) I knew it!

JULIET. Knew what?

RUTH. That the stage is once more being set for a love scene. I'm invited — nay, commanded — to spend next week end — or as much longer as I'll stay — at Willowdene.

JULIET. Nothing strange about that.

RUTH. But there are two other guests — friends of my respected brother-in-law — and this is where the plot thickens. No names are given — but one is heralded as distinguished — and the other as fascinating — and a millionaire!

JULIET. Are you to kill two birds with one stone?

RUTH. That's too much for my family to expect. They're doubtless hoping that if one fails to be hypnotized by my charms, the other will capitulate. Why is it, Jule, that my doting relatives are so anxious to marry me off?

JULIET. What does it say about the millionaire?

RUTH (*referring to letter*). Fascinating — oh, I told you that — clever — very traveled — and — (*joyfully*) — Hooray, hooray — you're invited, too!

JULIET (*dropping her letters*). How perfectly splendid!

RUTH. Now it will be *real* fun! (*Jumps up and pulls JULIET from settee.*) I hand over to you, forthwith, all the chances I might have with the millionaire. (*Swings her around.*)

JULIET (*as they reseat themselves on settee*). A

millionaire sounds good to me. When do we start?

RUTH. Friday next — if I'm not summoned before then by my new employer. In such a contingency — you go alone.

JULIET. Indeed I don't. But — don't worry — for Mr. Lansing is not apt to want you before then.

RUTH. I hope not. (*Sighs.*) The question is — will he want me at all?

JULIET. He has applied for a secretary — and my friend whose establishment is very reliable has enthusiastically endorsed you. So you ought to get it.

Enter SUSIE from R. with tray of lemonade and glasses which she places on porch table, then comes to C.

SUSIE. Excuse me, Miss Ruth, but Mr. Bruce is coming up the driveway.

RUTH. Good gracious — I'd forgotten all about Mr. Bruce. I'll see him here, Susie.

SUSIE. Yes, Miss Ruth. (*Exit at L.*)

RUTH. In the midst of all this excitement I've forgotten to reveal to you my method of attack upon the approaching victim. Just follow my cues and you'll be all right.

JULIET (*rising*). But — Ruth —

RUTH. Agree to everything I say — and when I raise my handkerchief to my eyes — so — it's your signal to depart.

Enter SUSIE at L., followed by LEONARD BRUCE, a rather pompous and important young man who, in his immaculate summer flannels, radiates conventionality and self-esteem.

SUSIE. Mr. Bruce. (*Exit at L.*)

RUTH (*meeting him at L. with both hands out-*

stretched). How splendid of you to arrive just when you're most needed.

BRUCE (*as, with RUTH, he crosses to JULIET at C.*). That's the very finest welcome a fellow could have. (*Greets JULIET.*) But how can I possibly be of use to you?

RUTH. You'll soon find out. (*Rushes him to chair right of table.*) There — sit down — and Juliet and I will take the settee. (*Sits at left end of settee.*)

JULIET. Not until I bring Mr. Bruce some lemonade. (*Goes to porch where she slowly fills a glass with lemonade.*)

BRUCE (*leaning forward and whispering*). Ruth — ever since last night —

RUTH. Yes — last night —

BRUCE. I've been hoping that you will give me my answer this afternoon.

RUTH. You shall have your answer this afternoon.

BRUCE. Will it be — the right one?

RUTH (*softly*). I think — it will. (*Sentimentally.*) It's very wonderful that some one like you should care for — me.

BRUCE (*consciously*). Oh, don't put it that way!

RUTH. Why not?

BRUCE. Because there may be lots of other men — just like me.

RUTH. Impossible. (*Sighs.*) And then — your family!

BRUCE (*arrogantly*). Came over in the *Mayflower*.

RUTH (*as JULIET approaches*). History can't be trusted a bit — can it? We're taught that comparatively few took passage on that sacred boat — and posterity has proved that thousands thronged the decks.

BRUCE (*suspiciously*). What do you mean by that?

JULIET. Nothing at all. Ruth is hardly herself today.

(BRUCE rises as he takes the proffered glass.)

BRUCE (*significantly*). I wonder why. (*Flourishes glass.*) To your health — each of you!

RUTH (*gloomily*). We need it. It's been a most trying day — hasn't it, Jule?

JULIET (*crossing back to settee and seating herself by RUTH*). Oh — very!

BRUCE (*as he resumes his chair*). Now what could happen to make it trying? Perhaps a new gown didn't fit.

RUTH. Worse than that.

BRUCE (*settling back in the chair and lazily sipping the lemonade*). Or did somebody beat you to the best looking hat in the window?

RUTH (*after a pause*). Haven't you heard, Mr. Bruce, that in the midst of life we are in death?

BRUCE. Good gracious! I hope that nothing has happened, that —

RUTH. Oh, no — nothing like *that*. What I meant to add was that — in the midst of riches we are in poverty.

BRUCE (*slowly straightening*). I don't understand.

RUTH. Of course you *couldn't* — but — well — today came a dreadful letter informing me that — (*turns*) Jule, you tell him what was in the letter.

JULIET (*tactfully*). Don't you think it's better for you to break the news?

RUTH. Perhaps so. (*Touches her eyes with her handkerchief*).

JULIET (*hastily*). Then I'll leave you — for a little while. (*Rises, crosses back of settee to BRUCE and*

whispers.) Be very gentle with her — for her nerves are all unstrung. (*Exit through porch, to right.*)

RUTH. This letter, Mr. Bruce — or I may call you Leonard now — may I not?

BRUCE (*nervously*). Yes — of course. Go on.

RUTH. Well, this letter brought the fearful news that my fortune has been swept away — (*pauses*) — quite away.

BRUCE. There — there must be some mistake. (*With shaking hand he places the unfinished glass of lemonade upon the table.*)

RUTH. Oh, I wish it *were* — but it's quite true — and instead of being a dollar sign I'm only — a zero.

BRUCE. Great heavens! (*Pauses.*) Perhaps it's only a passing flurry in the market — such things often happen, you know.

RUTH. The letter gives me no hope of anything transitory.

BRUCE. And it represents all your fortune?

RUTH. Quite all. (*After a moment.*) Now do you see why you came just at the right time?

BRUCE (*in confusion*). No — I confess I don't.

RUTH. Why, Leonard — don't you understand that I'm giving you your answer — and that it is the answer you — want?

BRUCE (*miserably*). But — wait —

RUTH. And that now I don't dread the future since I have — you — to take care of me?

BRUCE. I'm a poor man, Ruth.

RUTH. But I don't mind poverty a bit — and I'd so much rather have it with *you* — than by myself.

BRUCE. I can't give you the things to which you've been accustomed.

RUTH. Could you have done — *that* — last night when you asked me to marry you?

Bruce. No — but —

Ruth (*quietly*). I had the money. I see.

Bruce. You don't see — you — why, hang it all, Ruth, you wouldn't be happy with me — don't you understand?

Ruth. I understand. For you've just insinuated that you could marry me with a fortune — but not without.

Bruce. That's not what I mean. But, nowadays, conditions are different — living expenses are higher —

Ruth. And my money could have helped out. I'm sorry to disappoint you.

Bruce. And I'm sorry to disappoint you — I know it must hurt.

Ruth (*in surprise*). Disappoint me? (*As his meaning dawns upon her.*) Disappoint me! (*Hides her head in cushions to conceal her mirth.*)

Bruce (*rising*). Oh, say now — don't take it like that — you'll find somebody else, maybe, just like me —

Ruth (*emerging*). Never! (*Fervently.*) Oh, never! (*Hides her face again.*)

Bruce. And you'll get over it in time — (*awkwardly patting her shoulder*) — you'll even see that it was for the best. (*Nervously.*) Good-bye!

Ruth (*emerging*). But it isn't good-bye. You'll hear from me, tomorrow.

Bruce (*wildly*). It isn't necessary to go all over it again, is it?

Ruth (*rising*). Only by telephone — so — tomorrow — when I ring you up, remember — as you said — that it's all for the best. (*Touches button left of French window.*) Won't you finish your lemonade?

BRUCE (*confusedly*). Not this afternoon — I mean not now — I — really I must be going — (*desperately*) — I don't quite understand you I'm afraid.

RUTH. No — I'm afraid you don't.

Enter SUSIE from L.

RUTH. Susie, show Mr. Bruce to the door. (*Holds out hand to BRUCE.*) Goodbye — and better luck next time. (*BRUCE hesitates, attempts to speak, hesitates again — and then follows SUSIE from the room. RUTH leans against the wall and laughs to herself. Calls to JULIET.*) "Come out of the garden, Jule — For the black bat has flown."

JULIET (*appearing on porch*). I'm not in the garden — and I've been eavesdropping. What do you mean, you Ananias, Sapphira and disgrace to George Washington, by telling such awful, whopping big untruths?

RUTH. 'Twas my own little way of discovering a dishonest man — and it worked beautifully. (*Seats herself at left of porch table.*) Come — drink to the success of the stratagem! (*Pours out lemonade.*)

JULIET (*as she sits opposite RUTH*). You may call it a stratagem but I call it — a lie.

RUTH (*passing her the glass of lemonade*). Well — as the lady in the play said — better to lie a little than be unhappy much.

JULIET. But how will you explain all this story?

RUTH. Easily. Call him up tomorrow — tell him that a telegram has informed me that the letter was a mistake — and that my bank account is still intact.

JULIET. And then?

RUTH. He'll call again. But — this time — I won't be at home.

JULIET. You won't feel so complacent when he tells around that you are madly in love with him — and that he doesn't reciprocate.

RUTH. I don't believe that he'll tell it — for he was a bit suspicious at the last. But — even with that blot upon my 'scutcheon, immortality is cheap at such a price.

JULIET. You're becoming a trifle mixed in your rhetoric.

RUTH. Who wouldn't? Oh, Jule, if you could have seen the poor, conceited creature patting my shoulder and offering consolation for the loss of himself!

JULIET. It was dreadful of you to laugh.

RUTH. And he thought I was crying! Jule, I believe I am destined to be an actress.

JULIET. Don't feel too encouraged — your efforts may not succeed with the next victim. For Wayne Ashley isn't after your money.

RUTH. But he's after a key to social position and he thinks I can supply it.

JULIET. You can.

RUTH. But I won't. And by the time I engage in a few flights of verbal fancy he won't want me.

JULIET. What kind of a man is he?

RUTH. Dreadfully anxious to do the proper thing, don't you know — and disgustingly fond of show. He will expect his wife to conform to the same standards.

Enter SUSIE at L.

SUSIE (*advancing to porch*). Mr. Ashley is in the drawing room.

RUTH. Show him here, Susie. (*Exit SUSIE at L.*) Suitors are crowding thick and fast. You might emu-

late the old ladies in the French Revolution, Jule, and count the heads as they fall.

JULIET. Is that all the use you have for me?

RUTH (*rising*). That's all. (*Lau ghingly.*) Unless you care to — listen.

JULIET disappears off R. as WAYNE ASHLEY enters preceded by SUSIE. He is a man approaching middle age, and wears a correctly tailored business suit. But a closer inspection shows that his tie is a little too gaudy, his scarf pin a wee bit blatant, and his ring a trifle conspicuous.

SUSIE. Mr. Ashley. (*Exit at L.*)

RUTH (*advancing to meet him*). Delighted to see you, Mr. Ashley. Sit right there in the big chair while I pour you some lemonade. (*Crosses to porch.*)

ASHLEY (*sitting right of table*). That's ripping of you. Say, I ought to apologize for coming here in these clothes.

RUTH (*turning her head*). What's the matter with your clothes?

ASHLEY. Not quite the proper ticket for calling — are they?

RUTH. We don't bother about such trifles in this house.

ASHLEY. *Trifles?* When Miss Moore has the reputation of wearing the most correct clothes in town.

RUTH (*coming to him*). Oh, you don't know the real me, the unconventional me — the me who is struggling for self expression. (*Hands him the lemonade and seats herself on the settee.*)

ASHLEY (*as he sips the lemonade*). This certainly goes to the spot. It's a hot day.

RUTH. Thermometer performing all sorts of antics, isn't it?

ASHLEY. Rather. But I don't let weather interfere with business — ever.

RUTH. That's the proper spirit.

ASHLEY. So I came right along this afternoon because I had a question to ask you. (*Leans forward.*) Say, you're looking great.

RUTH (*complacently*). It *is* a pretty dress.

ASHLEY. I didn't mean *that*.

RUTH. Flatterer!

ASHLEY. And I'd like to see just such a woman as you behind my coffee urn!

RUTH. Shouldn't you think that the lady behind the coffee urn and the man behind the beefsteak would get very tired of looking at each other three hundred and sixty-five days in succession?

ASHLEY. Not if you happened to be the lady.

RUTH. Oh, let's not mention beefsteak and coffee on an August afternoon! Tell me, instead, just what you've been doing today.

ASHLEY (*boastingly*). Well — for one thing — I've cleaned up a little deal that netted me four figures; then I've bought me a new roadster — thirty-five hundred cash — just room for two, by the way; and I've got the option on the best looking house on the Avenue. I tell you, Miss Moore, *my* wife can buy anything she wants.

RUTH. Generous man!

ASHLEY. Of course that doesn't mean much to you for you've always had anything you've happened to want — and have been free to do whatever struck your fancy.

RUTH. Oh, no, I haven't! A man may do just as

he wishes — always — but a woman is never a free agent until after she is married.

ASHLEY. How do you make that out?

RUTH. Well — until she is really settled, any girl feels obliged to abide by the conventional routine of everyday life. But — afterwards — (*pauses*).

ASHLEY. Afterwards — *what*?

RUTH. You just wait until I'm a married woman — and I'll show you. For I shall be very different from what I am — now.

ASHLEY. You're kidding me!

RUTH. Oh, no, I'm not.

ASHLEY. You couldn't be anything but pretty, well-dressed and entertaining.

RUTH. Oh, *couldn't* I? You won't believe me when I say that I've always wanted plain dark clothes — and low-heeled, wide shoes with rubber in the sides — and bobbed hair, *real* bobbed hair, that one doesn't have to keep in order. And a hat — a nice, flat little hat with a rubber under the chin.

ASHLEY. That's hardly the rig for social affairs.

RUTH. Oh, I'll be through with society by that time — it bores me anyway. And I'll have my own crowd of literary lights — and musicians — and artists — and queer people who have brains.

ASHLEY (*placing his unfinished glass of lemonade upon the table*). You surely don't mean all this.

RUTH. *Don't I?* As I said before — wait and see.

ASHLEY. Suppose your husband objects.

RUTH. I'll never rest until I convert him to my way of thinking.

ASHLEY (*rising*). I must be going — (*as she protests*) really. (*Looks at watch.*) I'd clean forgotten a business appointment.

RUTH (*rising*). But the question you were to ask me!

ASHLEY. That'll keep. (*Moves to door.*)

RUTH (*following him*). Oh, I hate to have your visit interrupted. Can't you come again?

ASHLEY. Leaving town tomorrow.

RUTH. Let me ring for Susie.

ASHLEY. Don't bother — can find my own way out. (*At L.*) Good-bye, Miss Moore — had a pleasant afternoon — and (*seizing her hand hastily*) I'll see you later. (*Exit at L.*)

RUTH (*calling*). Did you hear the head fall?

Enter JULIET from porch

JULIET. I heard enough to make me wonder how the Recording Angel has found time today for anybody but you.

RUTH. I managed it pretty cleverly, didn't I? (*Sits right of table.*)

JULIET. You were — unspeakable. Why did you represent yourself as such a monstrosity? (*Perches upon left arm of settee.*)

RUTH. Great, wasn't it? The more I said, the more alluring it all seemed; in fact, I don't know but what I have convinced myself. (*Extending foot and looking at it thoughtfully.*) I'd love the rubber-sided shoes.

JULIET. Disgusting!

RUTH. And the rubber under the chin!

JULIET. And why on earth did you advance such a ridiculous philosophy?

RUTH. *Philosophy?* If I advanced any philosophy, I did it unintentionally, and I apologize. Explain yourself.

JULIET. You said that a woman's freedom began after her marriage — when you know, down in your heart, that her bondage dates from that time.

RUTH. Oh, *that* sentiment was merely rhetorical effort — and if it happened to turn into a philosophical subtlety *he* didn't grasp it. So — why worry?

JULIET. I don't. Except over the fact that you have voluntarily and arbitrarily eliminated two suitors.

RUTH. That's what I planned to do — and it is a great satisfaction to achieve what one plans. (*Relaxes.*) But it has been something of a strain — and I hope that, never again, do I lay eyes on a man!

At this moment, DWIGHT LAMBERT appears on the porch, resplendent in white suit and shoes and carrying a Panama. He is of the irresponsible, irrepressible college type — and his winning smile gains your favor even before he has spoken.

LAMBERT (*coming to French window*). Hello, you people. (*Looks around.*) Is *she* here?

JULIET. Why are you snooping around our garden, Dwight Lambert?

RUTH. And who is the mysterious she?

LAMBERT. That's a pretty question to ask a fellow who is to be married a week from today.

JULIET. In stories, the mysterious she always appears at the eleventh hour. (*Sits on settee.*)

LAMBERT. Not in this case. There's never been anybody but Peggy Pat since the perambulator stage.

RUTH. Which isn't so very long ago. (*Points to hassock.*) Come here, baby boy, and tell us all about it.

LAMBERT (*drawing hassock near RUTH and seating himself*). You see, I'm to meet her here.

RUTH. And I'm delighted to furnish the rendezvous. But would you mind telling me *why* I furnish it?

LAMBERT. *Why?* Because I can't possibly see her at her own home.

RUTH. Again, ignorance prompts me to say — why not?

JULIET. Good gracious, Ruth! Surely you don't expect a girl to have time for her fiancé on the eve of the great event.

LAMBERT. Wait until your own wedding and you'll find out for yourself.

RUTH. But I won't have a wedding — for I intend to elope.

LAMBERT. Elope! That's a bully plan.

RUTH. The bulliest plan in the matrimonial calendar. For — instead of the usual fuss and feathers — and the everlasting interference of the world at large — an elopement requires only the two most concerned.

LAMBERT. Gosh! Why didn't we think of it.

RUTH. Too late, now. You and Peggy Pat are advertised as having the showiest wedding of the season, aren't you?

LAMBERT (*gloomily*). It looks like it.

JULIET. With more entertainments to the bride's credit than ever before recorded.

LAMBERT. She's sick of them, too : and, what's more, she's dead tired.

RUTH. Of course she is. So I revert to my original argument — why not elope?

LAMBERT. Why didn't you tell us sooner?

RUTH. Isn't that just like a man? Blaming a woman for what he, himself, should have thought of.

LAMBERT. Getting married is an awful job, isn't it? I thought that all there was to it was — well, just getting married — but — heavens — it's everybody's business.

RUTH. Exactly. Why did you agree to all these ridiculous preliminaries?

LAMBERT. I should have agreed to anything in order to get Peggy Pat. Do you blame me?

RUTH. I don't blame either of you — you're the victims of convention.

LAMBERT. It's been a funny sort of engagement — not a bit like a *real* engagement. Every time I've seen Peggy Pat, we've been interrupted — and now, I'm forbidden the house.

RUTH. Too many dressmakers I suppose.

LAMBERT. And no time to waste on the bridegroom.

JULIET. Poor Dwight! You're like the proverbial needle hidden in a mass of wedding finery!

LAMBERT. So you see — I am forced to meet her at other people's houses — and, sometimes, even *then* I can't see her alone.

RUTH. Well, you can, here. There's a distracting little arbor in the garden, obligingly screened in — and later on, we'll send you some lemonade.

LAMBERT (*looking at the two glasses on table*). What's the matter with the lemonade? Your preceding guests didn't seem to relish it.

RUTH. My preceding guests were laboring under the stress of great emotion. (*Rises and draws him up from hassock.*) Now hurry out to your trysting place — and as soon as Peggy Pat arrives, I'll restore her to your arms.

LAMBERT. You're a brick — and the two of you have pepmed me up a lot. I don't mind telling you

now — that, a while ago, I felt as if I'd like to chuck it all.

RUTH. *Dwight!*

LAMBERT (*as he makes his way to porch*). But I'm all right now. (*Turns.*) And I'll stick it out.

RUTH. Good boy! Next time you marry, suppose you plan to elope!

LAMBERT (*grinning*). You bet I will. (*Disappears right of porch.*)

RUTH. I hate to see a wholesale robbery of the nursery. (*Leans back over settee.*) Dwight should be in college.

JULIET. What's the difference? He would marry Peggy Pat sometime — so he might as well do it now and settle down. They can grow up together.

RUTH. Ridiculous custom, this killing of the fatted calf for matrimonial victims.

JULIET. I could stand the fatted calf better than the unsolicited advice.

RUTH. I couldn't stand any of it — so, again I say — let's elope, Jule!

JULIET. Agreed. Heaven send us the opportunity!

At this moment, a vision appears at L.— or to be more exact — blows in. The vision resolves itself into the sweetest kind of a maiden, attired in a dainty be-ruffled summer gown, crowned with a large, flower-laden hat and carrying a distractingly gay parasol. The vision — or PEGGY PAT.

PEGGY PAT (*gazes wildly about her and then gasps feebly*) Is he here?

RUTH (*going to meet her*). Of course he's here, waiting for you in the arbor. Will you go right out or stay here a moment to rest?

PEGGY PAT. I'll rest a moment — for I'm dreadfully tired — and I've hurried — hurried — hurried — ever since morning. I didn't even stop to ring your bell.

RUTH (*leading her back of settee*). Why should you? Take a long breath and sit here quietly between us till you get your bearings. (*As she takes off Peggy Pat's hat*). Good gracious, child — what have you been doing to yourself — and where's your color? (*Peggy Pat sits between Ruth and Juliet on settee*.)

PEGGY PAT. In the nice little box that you buy at the druggist's. That's the only kind I have nowadays. (*Pauses*.) It's the hot weather I suppose.

RUTH. Nothing of the kind,— it's the mad whirl of silly parties. How many more of them?

PEGGY PAT. Only a few — but they're big ones and I'll be just as tired.

RUTH. Why did you want all this fuss and feathers?

PEGGY PAT. I didn't — but I was so glad to get Dwight that I would have agreed to anything. It was all mother's idea. (*Plaintively*.) I don't believe I have a single idea of my own left.

JULIET. Couldn't you refuse some of the invitations?

PEGGY PAT. Not when I have eight bridesmaids — and a mob of relatives — and a lot of old family friends all wanting to be nice to me. I just can't hurt people's feelings.

RUTH. But you can ruin your nerves. What kind of a bride will Dwight claim, next week, if *this* continues?

PEGGY PAT. He won't claim any — for — oh, Ruth — I just can't go through with it all — and I came here today — to tell him so. (*Weeps*.)

RUTH. To — tell — him — that — you — won't — marry — him? (PEGGY PAT *nods violently*.) Are you going to allow a few parties to turn you into such a hysterical goose?

PEGGY PAT. Oh, I could live through the parties — but it's the things that people say —

RUTH (*sharply*). What things?

PEGGY PAT (*sobbing*). That marriage is very solemn — and a great responsibility — and that you run the risk of not being suited to each other.

RUTH (*shaking her violently*). Now listen to me, Peggy Pat — and stop all this nonsense. Marriage is solemn — and a responsibility — but a great many people have been willing to take the risk, haven't they?

PEGGY PAT (*meekly*). Yes —

RUTH. Then you can be pretty sure that it's all right. And if I hear any more of this ridiculous talk, I'll believe that you're tired of Dwight — and don't care a rap for him.

PEGGY PAT (*indignantly*). Tired of Dwight? I'll never — never — *never* marry any other man!

RUTH (*putting PEGGY PAT's hat on her head*). Then go right out in the garden and tell him so — and when that overworked wedding march breaks forth next Wednesday night — show him what a bully little pal is coming his way.

PEGGY PAT (*smiling*). I will — oh, I will — And I feel so much better about it all.

RUTH. You and Dwight should have planned an elopement. Then you could have escaped all this agony.

PEGGY PAT. An elopement — how perfectly grand! Oh, I wish we'd thought of it! (*Sighs*.) But mother would never have allowed it.

RUTH. Mother need not have known.

PEGGY PAT. She knows everything — why, she even found out I was coming here this afternoon — and she didn't like it a bit. (*Rises.*) Ruth — if she telephones — don't tell her that Dwight is here.

RUTH (*rising*). Trust me.

PEGGY PAT. Of course, I don't want you to tell an untruth for me —

RUTH. I don't mind it a bit. In fact, recent practice has enabled me to do so quite unconsciously.

PEGGY PAT. Then I'll run right out to Dwight — and — oh Ruth — (*grasps her hands*) — thank you so much. (*Hastens to porch and then turns.*) Wouldn't it have been — heavenly — to elope? (*Runs off right of porch.*)

JULIET (*rising and crossing to table*). Now you've done it.

RUTH. Done what?

JULIET. Suggested an elopement. (*Takes glasses from table and crosses to porch table.*)

RUTH. Fiddlesticks! I simply outlined what might have been.

JULIET (*as she places glasses on porch table*). Just the same, you wouldn't feel very proud of yourself if those infants decided to follow your advice.

RUTH (*coming to C.*). I'm not worried about *that*. Peggy Pat is not apt to cut loose from the maternal apron string at this late hour — and as to Dwight — you heard him say that he would stick it out.

JULIET (*joining RUTH at C.*). But they haven't talked it over — together — yet.

Enter SUSIE at L.

SUSIE. Telegram for Miss Juliet.

JULIET (*in surprise*). For me? (*Takes telegram.*)
SUSIE. I signed for it.

JULIET (*as she opens it*). Thank you, Susie.
(*Exit SUSIE at L.*) What can it be? (*Comes slowly down stage as she reads.*)

RUTH (*following to back of settee*). No bad news, Jule?

JULIET. Hardly. It is from the agency.

RUTH (*excitedly*). What does it say?

JULIET. Listen. (*Reads.*) Lansing asks that MacDonald report September first at Kensington.

RUTH (*bewildered*). You mean —

JULIET (*laughing*). That you are Gilbert Lansing's secretary, my dear!

CURTAIN

RUTH IN A RUSH

THE SECOND ACT

SCENE: To the sound of wind, rain and thunder, the curtain rises upon the waiting room of a little country station. A long, wooden seat—or built-in bench—extends along the back wall, save for an enclosed space at the upper right hand corner, which has an unseen outside entrance and serves as a ticket office, bearing the word TICKETS in glaring letters, over its closed window. A large map and a heavy-typed calendar hang on the wall above the seat, and down L. is an old-fashioned water cooler. Another wooden seat runs along the right of the room and at L. 2 a forlorn stove, in company with a box of kindling wood, keeps vigil. The outside entrance is down L. and the door opens toward the audience.

The stage is clear for a few moments, and then quite suddenly the door opens and GILBERT LANSING, followed by PHILIP GRANT—both carrying suit-cases—enter. Over their dark serge suits they wear long rain coats, which together with their motor caps are dripping wet. LANSING, a man of about thirty-two, whose hair at the temples is slightly touched with gray, impresses one with a quiet dignity which quickly disappears when the situation demands the change. This keen sense of humor, coupled with an adaptability and a certain charm of manner, gives him a distinct personality. GRANT—of about the same age—is polished, a bit languid, a trifle bored and quite the cosmopolitan—but natural and simple when his interest is aroused.

LANSING (*crossing to R.*). Something of a steady downpour, isn't it, Phil? And rather different from the passing summer shower you predicted. (*Shoves his suit-case under the bench.*) Well — since Fate decreed that gasoline should go back on us, 'twas thoughtful of the old lady to inflict the catastrophe where we could have shelter.

GRANT (*placing his suit-case under seat at back of stage*). I might as well confess that I'm not only a poor weather prophet but a wretched judge of roads. I never dreamed that we should get into any such mud hole as this beastly place. (*Sits and lights a cigarette.*)

LANSING (*looking around*). Well, this isn't so beastly.

GRANT. It's hardly — inspiring. Though I presume that every commonplace has its charm for a writer — and I've no doubt that the great Gilbert Lansing can evolve local color even from this atmosphere.

LANSING. Don't be sarcastic, Phil.

GRANT. I'm not sarcastic — I'm merely a hero-worshipper. Inarticulate admiration doubtless accounts for my steering you into all these rural ruts.

LANSING (*as he sits on seat down R. and throws off his cap*). Don't you know the topography of your country estate any better than this?

GRANT. Until today I've never happened to drive in this particular direction. My usual route is a perfectly respectable macadam highway.

LANSING. How much farther is Willowdene?

GRANT. Far enough to check our mad career unless the sun comes out and a beneficent providence sends us gasoline.

LANSING. At what time does the connecting train reach this metropolis?

GRANT. When the spirit moves, I fancy. (*Looks at watch.*) Past three o'clock now — and I imagine that whatever it does, it will do pretty soon.

LANSING. We are expected for dinner, aren't we?

GRANT. We are. But if unforeseen contingencies arise, why worry?

LANSING. I'm not worrying. And as you know week-end parties have no fascination for me. (*Pauses.*) Why has Foster evinced this sudden interest in us?

GRANT. Same class at Yale — desire to renew old fellowship, etc. Wasn't that the dope?

LANSING. But our particular class graduated ten years ago and I haven't noticed his hunting us up during the ten years.

GRANT. Neither have I.

LANSING. And what's more, he never paid us any special attention when we were at college together.

GRANT. Too much of a snob — and at that time, we were both working our way through Yale, you remember.

LANSING (*after a pause*). Well, I may be stupid — but, even upon reflection, I am not able to fathom his motive in honoring us with the invitation.

GRANT. You *are* stupid in some ways, Gil. Doesn't your feeble intelligence grasp the fact that since our college days, *you* have become a celebrity and *I* have inherited my blasted money?

LANSING. I'm not such a celebrity that I affect the social register.

GRANT. That's all you know about it.

LANSING. And I don't like to hear you cuss your money. It's done a lot for you.

GRANT. In the way of travel — education — and

world knowledge. But it's blasted my ambition.

LANSING. Oh, no — it hasn't —

GRANT. I'm not the same fellow I was ten years ago, Gil. You know that.

LANSING. Neither am I. As we grow older, it's inevitable that we lose some of the youthful ardor.

GRANT. But I've had things made too easy for me. I haven't felt the necessity of work, and without an impetus, one doesn't arrive.

LANSING. Then find the impetus.

GRANT. I wish I could.

LANSING. Try — marrying.

GRANT. *Marrying?* What's struck you?

LANSING. An inspiration, perhaps. A nice girl would give you a very different viewpoint.

GRANT. All of which reminds me — (*pauses*).

LANSING. Of what?

GRANT. Of another reason for our being asked to the Willowdene estate. Mrs. Foster has a sister.

LANSING. Well — what of it?

GRANT. An unmarried sister.

LANSING (*puzzled*). Still I don't understand.

GRANT. You *are* an idiot. Try to realize that each one of us is an eligible.

LANSING. Great heavens! I won't go.

GRANT. The girl is an heiress.

LANSING. What's that to me?

GRANT. A moment ago you were rhapsodizing over the attractions and the advantages of my filthy lucre.

LANSING. That's different.

GRANT. Theoretically. If my money has meant so much to me, why shouldn't the lady's inheritance humanize *her*?

LANSING (*yawning*). The matter isn't worth an argument. (*After a pause.*) What is her name?

GRANT. Moore. And I have never laid eyes on her.

LANSING. That doesn't keep you from knowing just what she is, does it? Traveled, sophisticated, exceedingly bored — and critically examining every victim on the matrimonial bargain table.

GRANT. You speak feelingly of the species.

LANSING. I feel feelingly. For the girl who will sometime adorn the other side of my fireplace will be a jolly, companionable sort of a creature — not an artificial fashion plate.

GRANT. Already picked out the girl?

LANSING. No, I haven't already picked out the girl. At present, I feel as if I never wanted to see her.

GRANT. The literary temperament again! Better hurry up and find her, Gil, for with those gray temples you'll soon be taken for a crotchety old man.

LANSING. That is just what has already happened. Did you read the *Tribune's* description of me?

GRANT. Haven't had the pleasure.

LANSING. "Old, sarcastic and disagreeable" — it ran, after the usual necessary tribute to my prowess in the world of letters.

GRANT. What ailed the interviewer?

LANSING. A bit of temper, I fancy. I was not in the mood to discuss her thousand and one topics, so — metaphorically — she seized my gray hair.

GRANT. And added two score to your age. I don't blame her. (*Rises.*) Let's go into the fresh air — this place gets on my nerves. Anyway, I must find a better refuge for the car.

LANSING (*rising and taking his cap*). Anything

suits me. (*As they pass out.*) Suppose we organize a hunt for inhabitants.

The stage is clear for several moments during which one hears a locomotive, a bell and a whistle. As the whistle dies away, RUTH and JULIET enter, both struggling with a refractory umbrella and carrying traveling bags. They wear long, loose rain coats over their tailored suits and the umbrella has slightly tilted their small, modish, tailored hats.

JULIET. I never saw such a place. Nobody on the platform to help with baggage—and not a soul in sight. (*Goes to back of stage and throws her bag on seat.*)

RUTH. Oh, yes there *is*, Jule. A man 'way at the other end of the station, working with a car. I saw him. (*Stands at C. and shakes umbrella.*)

JULIET. One naturally expects somebody to be on hand at a station—to answer questions, if nothing else.

RUTH (*placing umbrella at R.*). But this is Sunshine Junction, my dear, and it doesn't happen to have the facilities of the Grand Central. (*Seats herself at R., and throws off her rain coat.*)

JULIET. Has it *any* facilities?

RUTH (*cheerfully*). I don't think so. Only a few people live here as it's only a connecting station—so it doesn't need the extras.

JULIET. You talk as if you really *liked* it.

RUTH. I do. I like anything that's out of the ordinary—and simple—and primitive. (*Suddenly.*) I like even this kind of weather.

JULIET. *Ruth!*

RUTH. And I'm so proud to think that I'm the one

who insisted upon our taking rain coats and umbrellas in case of emergency. We ran into the emergency all right. (*As she looks at her slightly muddied shoe.*) But I did forget the rubbers!

JULIET (*scornfully*). Rubbers! I don't own a pair!

RUTH. Well, when I purchase my nice, wide, low-heeled shoes, I intend to have some big roomy arctics to go with them. Sit down, Jule, and make yourself at home.

JULIET (*sitting at back of stage*). How long must we wait here?

RUTH. Ask me about the square of the fourth dimension or the formula for perpetual motion — but don't force me to follow the eccentric schedule of the Sunshine Junction train.

JULIET. Can't we find out about it?

RUTH (*gazing around*). Walls have ears — but nobody has ever endowed them with tongues.

JULIET. Isn't there any one to answer questions?

RUTH. Perhaps the man outside.

JULIET (*glancing at ticket window*). Or to sell tickets?

RUTH. Why sell tickets when there's nobody to buy them?

JULIET. But how do they know that *we* don't need them?

RUTH. And whom do you mean by that rather vague *they*?

JULIET. The ticket agent, of course.

RUTH. Then you're ungrammatical. You should have said *he* — or *she* — or *it*. Honest to goodness, Jule, I don't know a thing about the place save that it's a connecting link.

JULIET. Or a missing link, if the local fails us.

RUTH. Exactly. Your sense of humor is still with you, dear old thing, so I guess you're safe.

JULIET (*after a pause*). I'm ashamed to say it—but I loathe inconveniences.

RUTH. All the more reason that you should marry that millionaire.

JULIET. What about you?

RUTH. I am already planning a snare for the one who is heralded as *distinguished*. Now a millionaire may fall to the lot of any one—but a *distinguished* husband is the gift of the gods.

JULIET (*looking at her watch*). It's four o'clock.

RUTH. Then our friend, the local, should be with us in about half an hour. Mind you, I say *should* not *will*.

JULIET. Is it always late?

RUTH. Remember that only once have I tested its efficiency—for this is Jean's first summer in her new home. On that occasion it behaved itself in a seemly fashion—save that it stopped at every haystack.

JULIET. That's encouraging, if we are to arrive for dinner.

RUTH. We're expected. Well—be thankful that our trunks went on ahead of time. It won't take long to jump into our dinner clothes.

JULIET (*rising*). Well—I intend to investigate a bit. Maybe I can find out the whereabouts of the train.

RUTH. Ask the man with the car.

JULIET. I will. (*Exit.*)

(RUTH, left to herself, walks slowly about the room investigating each crack and corner, and humming a gay little tune. She examines the map, looks into the stove, and finally shoves her traveling bag under the

seat at R. As she does so, she naturally notices LANSING's suit case. In great excitement and surprise, she draws it out, kneels by it and looks for some mark of ownership.)

RUTH. Oh-h-h! The island is inhabited! (*Turns suit case around.*) Why doesn't he leave his name and address in some conspicuous place? (*The door behind her opens; thinking it is JULIET, she does not turn but continues her investigations.*) What do you think, Jule? Somebody is sharing our exile — a mysterious somebody — a somebody we didn't expect. I feel just like Robinson Crusoe! (*As there is no answer, her voice dies away — and she rises and turns to behold —*)

LANSING standing by the door.

LANSING (*removing his cap, smiling and bowing*). The ubiquitous and adaptable Friday at your service!

RUTH (*pointing to suit case*). Does this happen to be yours?

LANSING. It does. I'm sorry to disappoint you by not being the mysterious somebody you invoked. I'm hopelessly commonplace.

RUTH. And I'm hopelessly humiliated. I feel exactly as if you had caught me picking your pocket.

LANSING. Just because you examined an unexpected suit case? Nonsense. If your traveling bag had stood in my way, I should have done the same.

RUTH. You see, it was thrilling to come across it — for I had just about persuaded myself that nothing human existed in this place.

LANSING. A thorough search on my part has resulted in the discovery of two depot appendages — one,

a baggage man, though heaven knows what he finds to do — and the other, a hanger-on.

RUTH. Oh, dear — it's beginning to sound metropolitan.

LANSING. Isn't it? Then there is my friend —

RUTH (*eagerly*). The man with the car?

LANSING. Exactly. The usual story of capricious gasoline, and besides, a bit of engine trouble.

RUTH. Then *my* friend is probably interviewing him. (*Starts to push the suit case under the seat.*) I'll restore your property to its abiding place.

LANSING. Oh, let *me* do it — please — and I'll dispose of yours at the same time.

As they both lean over the suit case and the bag, the window to the ticket office flies open and a sharp voice cries "Tickets!" Startled, the two spring apart and RUTH crosses to door and goes out, leaving the door a bit ajar and listening from the other side. LANSING places both bags under the seat, then strolls leisurely to the window where SADIE SODASTROM is regarding him with the greatest interest.

SADIE SODASTROM is of a business-like and inquisitive type, and in her air and attire there is an imitation of city ways and city fashions. Her hair is in the approved style, her plain gingham gown is trim and neat and relieved by white collar and cuffs, but her dangling ear-rings give an unexpected and rather outré finish to her appearance.

SADIE (*repeating*). Tickets?

LANSING (*pushing money through window*). To Willowdene.

SADIE. Two, of course.

LANSING (*absent-mindedly*). Two. (*The door closes softly.*)

SADIE (*as she hands back the tickets and the change*). Some day, isn't it?

LANSING. Rather. Sunshine Junction isn't living up to its name. (*Places tickets and money in pocket.*)

SADIE. Oh, well — in that case, I reckon we can use the old city gag and tell strangers that it's very unusual weather for this time of year.

LANSING. Are you the ticket agent?

SADIE. Sure. And on the side lines, I listen to the telegraph machine, am first aid to the baggage man, pretend I'm depot agent and even keep a pair of handcuffs for the times when I have to play sheriff.

LANSING. Sheriff? Surely nothing ever happens in this peaceful community of Sunshine Junction!

SADIE. Oh, Sunshine Junction is all right — there ain't enough of us to scare up any spirit — but some tough customers stroll in. I had a tussle with an escaped convict once upon a time.

LANSING. You had a tussle?

SADIE. Sure. I was the only one here when he blew in, so it was up to me to get him.

LANSING. Great heavens, girl — what did you do?

SADIE. Got him into this cubby hole, locked the door back here (*motions*), and then stood outside the window there, yelling until help came.

LANSING. But he might have killed you.

SADIE. Oh, don't you think it. I had a pistol and he didn't — so it don't sound so much like a hold-up after all.

LANSING. It sounds risky enough to hope that all the other excitements are of a different kind.

SADIE. Well, rather. Elopements are right in our line.

LANSING. Elopements?

SADIE. Sure. We're near the state line — and right across is where they all go. (*Suspiciously.*) You don't happen to be eloping yourself, do you?

LANSING. Not this time.

SADIE. Seeing the young lady, you know —

LANSING. It isn't always wise to trust to circumstantial evidence.

SADIE. And if you hadn't bought those tickets to Willowdene, I'd a-thought you might be the man we're expecting.

LANSING. Hope I haven't disappointed you.

SADIE. No disappointment about it. For the man happens to be on his way to the lunatic asylum in the city.

LANSING. What?

SADIE. Oh, *he* ain't crazy — but he's taking a young girl who *is*. And we're half way expecting them here in time for the night train to the city — they come from up country.

LANSING. Has the girl — quite lost her mind?

SADIE. It's been gone ever since her lover was killed — poor little young thing, too, they say. Sad, ain't it?

LANSING. Yes, sad indeed.

SADIE. I hope she ain't violent — for I don't want to be made to use force.

LANSING. It seems to me that with all your talents, you're capable of a bigger job, Miss — Miss — (*inquiringly*) Miss —

SADIE (*promptly*). Sodastrom — Sadie Sodastrom. Sounds like a drink or medicine, don't it?

LANSING. It sounds — alliterative.

SADIE. What's that?

LANSING. Something that appeals to me. You see, I'm a writer.

SADIE. You don't say so! I've always wanted to see a real writer. (*After a critical inspection.*) You look like anybody else.

LANSING. Thanks.

SADIE. It's a job that don't pay very well, ain't it?

LANSING. That depends.

SADIE. You see — (*the telegraph instrument sounds*) — gracious, there's a message. (*Disappears. The sound continues for a few moments and SADIE returns to window.*) Say, you're going to have some wait. That there frisky local ain't intending to show up until six — and land knows if it'll get here then. There's been a wash-out on the road.

LANSING. So we're surely stranded! Well, there seems to be local color.

SADIE. Color? I don't see how you can spot any color on a messy day like this! (*Suddenly.*) Say?

LANSING. Yes?

SADIE. If that there instrument clicks — or if anybody wants me — you'll find me in the first house across the road. I've got a cake in the oven and I've also got a feeling that it's waiting to be taken out.

LANSING. Run along, then. I'll keep store.

SADIE. There won't be anything to do. I'm just mentioning all this in case that there *should* be.

LANSING. Count on me.

SADIE. So-long, then. (*Disappears.*)

LANSING *leans against the window, laughing, as GRANT opens the door in great excitement.*

GRANT. There are signs of life.

LANSING. Decidedly. And I've just learned that the local won't be in until six. So go back and talk to her.

GRANT. How do you know that I've been talking to any one?

LANSING. Because I've been scraping an acquaintance with the other one. So — with utter oblivion as to the weather — let us make hay while the sun shines.

GRANT. Perhaps you won't be so enthusiastic when you hear that they're both on their way to Willowdene.

LANSING. What?

GRANT. Yes, they are. They're probably — very probably — members of the same house party — and it stands to reason that one of them is the heiress.

LANSING. How did you find out all this?

GRANT. I was working on the car when some one said very softly — "Can you tell me if the train to Willowdene is on time?" I looked up — and there she stood!

LANSING. Judging from your expression, you didn't mind looking at her.

GRANT. I guess not. Gil, for an heiress, she is certainly — one — big — peach!

LANSING. How do you know she's the heiress?

GRANT. I don't know it, of course — but some way, I feel that she's the one. There's something indefinably cultivated — and aloof — and princessy — about her.

LANSING. She doesn't sound good to me.

GRANT. Just wait until you meet her. She's fascinating — (*sighs*) — even if she is an heiress.

LANSING. Well, the friendly, pleasant and companionable girl I met can't be any such atrocity.

GRANT (*absent-mindedly*). Isn't it hard luck that she should have all that money?

LANSING. Hard luck?

GRANT. I don't want any girl who has a lot of money.

LANSING (*laughing*). So it's gone *that* far, has it?

GRANT (*coming to himself*). Go to thunder.

LANSING. I am. Also to the rain and the lightning. Those girls probably want to get out of the storm—and are waiting for us to give them the chance. (*Starts toward door.*)

GRANT. Wait a moment. Do you suppose that they know that *we* are in this house party?

LANSING. They probably have heard that there are to be other guests. But as to *us*—well, they don't even know where we're going. I bought the tickets a few moments ago—and nobody was around.

GRANT. Just the same—suppose we don't tell our names. There's no use in it.

LANSING. Just as you say. Come along. (*Exeunt.*)

In just a few moments RUTH and JULIET enter.

JULIET (*slamming the door*). That man must think I pursue him. Every time he emerges I'm at his heels.

RUTH (*crossing to R.*) Nonsense. You weren't at his heels, and, anyway, every traveler has a right to the waiting room. Come over here and sit down.

JULIET (*as they seat themselves*). They seem to be gentlemen, so let's be thankful for that. And they will probably be leaving us at any moment.

RUTH. Oh, no they won't!

JULIET. Why not?

RUTH. In the first place, their gasoline is out; in the second place, I heard *my* friend ask for two tickets to Willowdene. (*Throws off her rain coat.*)

JULIET. *To Willowdene!*

RUTH. That very place.

JULIET. Ruth — do you suppose — oh, could it be —

RUTH. The millionaire and the distinguished unknown? I don't doubt it.

JULIET. Well, *my* man isn't the millionaire — that's certain. Anybody who can regulate his own car — and who is so absolutely natural and simple in his manner — *can't* be a plutocrat.

RUTH. Well, his friend is just as natural and simple — and I'm just as sure that *he* isn't the plutocrat. So what are we going to do about it?

JULIET (*laughing*). Eliminate the millionaire. Anyway, these may be two guests of whom we haven't heard.

RUTH. Oh, no, they're not — for Jean is having only the four of us. She's probably informed them of our charms — but, still, *they* have no reason to suspect that we are the other guests.

JULIET. Oh, haven't they? I asked the man with the car all about the train to Willowdene — so it won't take long for the two of them to reach certain conclusions.

RUTH. But *they* don't know that *we* know that they're on their way to Willowdene. You see — I listened outside the door — while he was buying his tickets.

JULIET. Oh, it's getting horribly mixed! Nobody knows who the other person is!

RUTH. And nobody cares. We'll let it remain horribly mixed — and under no circumstances are we to give our names. If we must be designated — let it be Ruth and Juliet. That won't mean anything.

JULIET. Aren't we taking a great deal for granted — and being a little premature in our plans? The gentlemen may not care to take advantage of the situation — and we may not see them again until we get to our destination.

RUTH. "By the pricking of my thumbs"— I think they will. (*As the door slowly opens.*) What did I tell you? (*Draws out her bag and opens it.*) Get a magazine — and try to look perfectly unconcerned. (*Each takes a magazine from the bag, and again RUTH shoves it under the seat.*)

LANSING and GRANT enter, looking a trifle conscious and apologetic. They seat themselves at the back of the room, throw off their caps, produce their newspapers and try to appear engrossed in current topics. With much subdued chattering, the girls settle down to their reading and an enforced silence ensues, broken only by an occasional frenzied rustling of papers, and varied only by the numerous intercepted glances.

RUTH (in a whisper). Jule, they haven't read a word — I've watched them.

JULIET (also in a whisper). Well — neither have we.

(*The awkwardness of the situation increases, and finally LANSING, in exasperation, throws down his paper, rises, and walks to front of stage, where he turns and addresses the girls.*)

LANSING. Conventions are absurd and hampering things. Here we are, four bored mortals, stranded of necessity in the same station and the same room for two long hours.

RUTH (gasping). Oh — is the train that late?

LANSING. It's *that* late. Now, don't you think it would be ridiculous for us to ignore each other when the obviously sensible thing to do is to get acquainted and have a pleasant wait of it?

RUTH. Why, of course, it's the sensible thing to do. Why have you been so long in suggesting it?

JULIET. Especially, when each of us has indulged in a preliminary conversation with each of you?

GRANT (*rising and joining LANSING*). My dear young lady — (*as JULIET smiles*) — Now, what's funny about that?

JULIET. You're so nice and grand-fatherly.

GRANT (*in relief*). Then I'm perfectly safe.

JULIET. And we immediately suspend all conventions.

RUTH. We'll all be known by our first names. I'm Ruth.

LANSING. I'm Bert.

JULIET. I'm Juliet.

GRANT. Then I'll be Romeo.

RUTH. Now, we're all settled — and if we don't suit each other, we can become perfect strangers when the train comes in.

GRANT. Not much danger of that.

JULIET (*motioning*). Sit here, Romeo, and let's talk about the family feud. (*GRANT sits by her*.)

LANSING (*returning to back of stage*). Come over to my side, Ruth, and we'll play Robinson Crusoe.

RUTH. If you'll let me call you Friday instead of Bert.

LANSING. Anything unlucky about Friday?

RUTH (*crossing to him*). Not a bit of it. He was the luckiest thing that ever happened to Robinson Crusoe.

LANSING. Then Friday I am!

RUTH (*as they seat themselves*). How did you find out about this latest freak of the local?

LANSING. Heard it ticked off —

RUTH. And interpreted by the lady at the ticket window, I suppose.

LANSING. The same. Said lady gave me to understand that when it comes to real excitement, Sunshine Junction is right on the map.

JULIET. Excitement? *Here?*

LANSING. Here. Escaped convicts are a specialty.

GRANT. Quite metropolitan *that*.

LANSING. And also — eloping couples.

JULIET. Oh — what fun!

LANSING. And lunatics.

RUTH. *Lunatics?*

LANSING. One is scheduled for this very afternoon. Some poor young thing whose lover went west.

RUTH. Oh — *don't*.

LANSING. Anyway — if you think you're on a desert isle, guess again. As our friend Wordsworth says, "The world is too much with us."

JULIET. I believe it. If we were to investigate a little further, we should probably find an up-to-date café in the vicinity of the depot.

GRANT. How can you mention it, Juliet? Let me inform you that my friend and I had a scanty lunch, that it is tea time — and that there's everything in the power of suggestion.

RUTH (*thoughtfully*). Tea *wouldn't* be bad.

GRANT. Or sandwiches —

RUTH. Or little cakes. (*Glances at LANSING who seems lost in thought.*) Don't look so glum over the

situation, Friday — or is it possible that our bill of fare doesn't appeal to you?

LANSING. I happen to be thinking of a little hostelry in the Austrian Tyrol, where — once upon a time — I indulged in the most indescribable of dinners.

JULIET. And I happen to be thinking of a darling little inn tucked away in a village of France — with dainty white curtains and pots of red geraniums — where one is fed delicious soufflés, and heavenly salads and dream puddings. (*Sighs.*) I wish we were all there!

LANSING. Oh, come now, Juliet — that's too ethereal. Let's run up to London and indulge in some real roast beef on piping hot plates with boiled potatoes and Brussels sprouts as accessories.

JULIET. In summer time? No, thanks. Me for Devonshire and an arbor surrounded by hollyhocks and daisies where I can eat strawberries and cream to my heart's content.

GRANT. Aren't you traveled and uppish, both of you? We have no such lofty notions, have we, Ruth?

RUTH. Hardly. Why, I'd be content with any kind of an ice-cream that any kind of a drug store could furnish!

JULIET. What a gastronomical picture we've painted!

LANSING. Beginning in the Tyrol and ending in a corner drug store!

GRANT (*rising*). But it's going to end right here in Sunshine Junction station. I'm wondering if Juliet will help me make a survey of the surrounding country. For I intend to beg, borrow or steal enough to furnish us with a substitute for afternoon tea.

JULIET (*rising*). What fun! Of course I'll go.

RUTH. And while you are foraging I'll keep the home fires burning.

JULIET. In what, please?

RUTH (*pointing*). That stove. I've had my eye on it for some time — and I see possibilities.

JULIET. What nonsense!

RUTH. You won't say so — later on.

GRANT. Are you really game, Juliet, about going out in all this rain?

JULIET. So game that I won't play at all unless you take me along.

GRANT. Then off we go — and who knows but that the heavens will rain manna upon us! (*Opens the door.*)

RUTH. Please bring me some tea.

JULIET. But, Ruth — we have no way of making tea.

RUTH. Never mind about that. Just bring me the tea.

GRANT. You bet we'll bring it. (*Exeunt GRANT and JULIET.*)

RUTH (*jumping up*). This is what I call *real* fun — and a *real* adventure. (*Comes down stage.*) I've always wanted to be cast upon a desert island with nothing to rely upon but my own ingenuity —

LANSING (*following*). And your man, Friday. Don't leave him out.

RUTH. I couldn't. Has he a match?

LANSING (*producing a match safe*). Plenty of them.

RUTH. And a newspaper?

LANSING. Enough to start a bonfire. (*Takes papers from pocket and throws rain coat to back of stage.*)

RUTH. Then — let's get to work. (*Goes to stove and opens door.*) Look! Some real coal in it — and (*points to wood*) — some wood — and (*takes lid from stove*) the top comes off. Hurrah for our cup of tea!

LANSING. I have faith in your magic wand, Ruth — but I don't see —

RUTH (*kneeling in front of stove*). Of course you don't see. Let's make the fire — and then we'll demonstrate. (*Together they lay the wood and newspaper, while LANSING applies the match.*) Do you think it will burn?

LANSING. Sure. (*As she crosses to R., and opens her traveling bag.*) Now what are you planning to evolve — a tea kettle and some tea cups? (*Follows.*)

RUTH. How did you ever guess it? (*Takes out a large box, lays the lid on the seat and empties the remaining marshmallows in the lid.*) This (*waving box*) is our tea-kettle — bend a nice little spout in it, will you? (*He takes it.*) And here are our tea cups. (*Takes paper cups from bag.*) Six perfectly good paper drinking cups.

LANSING. You're a wizard. (*Flourishes box.*) How's that for a spout?

RUTH (*taking it*). Corking. Now, all we need is a handle — and that's in the Capulet bag. (*Goes to back of stage, opens JULIET's bag and draws out curling tongs which she snaps on the box.*) Now with a little turn — and twist — so — we have —

LANSING. A saucepan. I insist that it is a saucepan instead of a tea kettle.

RUTH. I believe you're right. Anyway it's *my* invention. (*Runs to stove and peeps in.*) And — oh, Friday — the fire's burning!

LANSING. Of course it is. That newspaper was hot stuff.

RUTH. No time for silly jokes! Get me some water in this saucepan — just enough to scald it.

LANSING (*as he takes it*). Shall I stand outside and let the rain fall into it?

RUTH. You're not very observing, Friday, or that stunning water cooler would have impressed itself indelibly upon your mind. (*Points.*)

LANSING. My mind — and eyes — have been otherwise occupied. (*Draws water from cooler.*)

RUTH. There — that's enough. (*As she takes off the stove lid, LANSING places the box upon the stove.*) You aren't much of a domestic treasure, are you?

LANSING. Didn't we agree not to ask personal questions?

RUTH. We did — and I stand corrected. (*Mischievously.*) But, just the same — you aren't.

LANSING. But *you* are.

RUTH (*laughing*). Just because I know how to construct a saucepan and to boil water? (*As GRANT and JULIET enter.*) Did you have any luck?

JULIET. It depends upon what you call luck.

LANSING. You certainly don't look as if you'd bought out the town.

GRANT. Naturally, we didn't feel like invading private homes — but we did find a funny little shop where an equally funny little woman very grudgingly parted with her few wares. (*Hands small parcel to RUTH.*) Here's your tea, Ruth.

RUTH. Well — that helps.

JULIET (*handing another small parcel to RUTH*). And enough sugar, I hope.

GRANT (*producing lemon from one pocket*). Also a

lemon. (*Critically regards it.*) Even the most dauntless optimist must confess that it has outlived its usefulness.

JULIET (*waving a cracker box*). And some crackers — the nice, big old-fashioned kind. (*Throws rain coat off, R.*)

GRANT (*producing cheese from the other pocket*). And cheese. (*Sniffs.*) It's the kind that believes in advertising itself.

LANSING (*at stove*). Please, cook, the water's boiling.

RUTH (*turning to him*). That's just to sterilize the box. Now throw it out and re-fill for the tea. (*LANSING obeys.*)

JULIET (*examining box*). Well of all queer looking contrivances!

RUTH. You're just cross because those tongs silently reveal to the assembled multitude the fact that your hair doesn't curl naturally. Open the crackers and make a nice little tea ball for me out of your cleanest, freshest handkerchief. (*JULIET busies herself at R.*)

LANSING (*placing box on stove*). Put Romeo to work.

RUTH. He's good at sword play so he may slice the lemon and cut the cheese. (*Sniffs.*) Perhaps, you'd better go out into the open for that operation, Romeo. (*Takes tea which JULIET has tied into one end of a handkerchief.*)

GRANT (*throwing rain coat on seat at back of stage and systematically going through his pockets*). By Jove — I don't believe I have a knife.

LANSING. Then — try mine. (*Hands him a knife.*) Though that lemon needs a razor. (*Sniffs as GRANT*

slices cheese.) You needn't count me in on the cheese deal.

GRANT (*slicing lemon*). Now what's the matter with the cheese? "A rose by any other name would smell as sweet."

RUTH. Something wrong with your sense of smell, Mr. Montague.

JULIET (*crossing to GRANT*). Lend me your knife, Romeo. This box seems to be nailed together. (*Sniffs.*) Dear me! Don't you think it's a bit strong? (*Uses knife, then lays it upon seat.*)

GRANT (*reproachfully*). Even you, Juliet, stand against me.

JULIET (*pointing to cheese*). How can I stand *with* you?

GRANT. Then out it goes — (*dramatically*). And if your feast is cheeseless, blame not the Montague! (*Goes to door and throws out the cheese.*) Sounds like Shakespeare, doesn't it? Shows that any old fellow can talk in blank verse if he half tries.

LANSING. Just finding that out?

RUTH (*at stove*). Water's almost ready for the tea. Drag out the suit cases, Romeo, and you and Juliet can be guests. Friday and I will do the honors. (*GRANT and JULIET seat themselves on suit cases at C.*)

GRANT (*as LANSING presents each with a paper cup*). What's this?

LANSING. It's your tea cup. Don't act as if you'd never been out in polite society.

RUTH (*following with tin box*). I pour some water — so — hold it steady, Romeo — then drop in the tea ball — (*holds it in water for a moment*) — and there you are! Follow with the lemon and the sugar, Friday. (*Passes on to JULIET.*)

LANSING. Where is the lemon?

GRANT. Over by the cheese knife.

LANSING. Great heavens! The lemon won't have a chance. (*Crosses.*)

RUTH. You must stir your tea with the knife as we haven't spoons. Bring it along, Friday, and I'll pass the sugar. (*To GRANT as she opens the package of sugar.*) How much shall I shake out?

GRANT. A lot. (*Makes wry face as he tastes it.*) This tea needs *something*.

RUTH. That isn't nice to say when I made it.

LANSING (*stirring GRANT's tea vigorously with knife.*) I should say *not*. You don't need any lemon after that remark.

JULIET (*to RUTH*). I don't want that sugar — it looks dirty. (*Critically.*) I don't care for any lemon, either.

RUTH. Well of all particular creatures! (*Points to crackers which JULIET still holds.*) Pass the crackers, Jule. Perhaps they will help out. (*RUTH and LANSING stand at stove with backs to GRANT and JULIET.*)

LANSING. Now let me fix *your* tea for you.

RUTH. No — you're first, Friday — (*as he protests*) — oh, I insist. Here's your cup. (*He holds it as she pours the water and lowers the tea ball.*) Shall I make it strong?

LANSING (*without taking his eyes off her*). Make it any old way.

RUTH. Sugar?

LANSING. Do you think I need it?

RUTH. We aren't to ask personal questions, you know. (*Pauses.*) Lemon?

LANSING. I hope you don't think so.

RUTH. I don't.

JULIET (*who, in the meantime, has presented GRANT with a cracker*). I never saw such crackers. I can't even get my teeth through them.

GRANT (*gloomily*). Crackers? They're dog biscuit.

RUTH (*who, with LANSING, has been oblivious to the others*). Now, drink my health.

LANSING. With all my heart. (*Drinks.*) It's heavenly brew.

GRANT. This stuff doesn't seem to mix.

JULIET. And the cup is so hot that I can't hold it,— and it's dreadful to drink it all at once.

RUTH (*as LANSING proceeds to fill her cup and to make the tea*). You are a domestic treasure, Friday. I take back everything I said to the contrary.

LANSING. Now suppose you drink *my* health.

RUTH. With all my heart. (*Drinks.*) It isn't so bad, is it?

JULIET. Well, *Ruth!* I should think that your alimentary canal would be scalded! Think of drinking it down like that! (*No answer.*) I don't believe that you two know what you *are* doing.

GRANT. And they certainly don't know what we're saying. (*Rises.*) Come along, Juliet — now's the time to ditch the food. (*They tiptoe to the door and disappear.*)

RUTH. How about that indescribable dinner in the Austrian Tyrol, Friday?

LANSING. I've forgotten it — now.

RUTH. And can you think upon the roast beef and the boiled potatoes and the Brussels sprouts without a regret?

LANSING. Without a regret.

RUTH. I don't believe it — but you're a dear to say so. What about the Devonshire strawberries and cream, Jule? (*Turns.*) Good gracious, they're gone.

LANSING. We don't care, do we?

Enter GRANT and JULIET

GRANT. It's stopped raining — and if we had gasoline we could all be on our way. Do you suppose there's a drop of the stuff in this benighted burg, Gil?

LANSING. We might investigate.

RUTH (*crossing to R.*). A brisk walk after our heavy meal won't hurt us, anyway. (*Gathers up the marshmallows.*) Gather up the trash, Friday, and put it all in the box by the stove. I'll slip on my coat. (*She puts on her coat as JULIET joins her at R., and as GRANT and LANSING place the suit cases in their former positions and dump the remains of the tea-party into the wood box.*)

LANSING (*at L.*). No doubt of which one is the heiress, is there? Did you see the way in which the finicky creature spurned her tea and talked of Devonshire strawberries?

GRANT. Who could have swallowed that stuff — it was rotten. Anyway, I don't care if she is the heiress.

LANSING. That suits me all right.

JULIET (*at R.*). Have you found out if he is the millionaire?

RUTH. I don't care if he is a rag picker.

JULIET. A noble — but peculiar sentiment — my dear.

GRANT. Come on, Juliet. We'll go ahead.

JULIET (*as she joins him at door.*). And blaze the trail. (*Exeunt GRANT and JULIET.*)

RUTH (*coming to LANSING*). Friday, what did Romeo call you a moment ago? *Gil?*

LANSING. Bill, I guess. It's a pet name he has for me. Let me remind you, Ruth, that we're not to ask each other personal questions.

RUTH (*as they pass out the door*). Sometimes, Friday, you're very irritating.

Hardly have they disappeared when the door cautiously opens and PEGGY PAT steps in. She is a woe begone object for her dainty summer gown is bedraggled — and a long dark coat has not wholly protected her from the storm. Her flower-laden hat droops pathetically and her white pumps are heavily crusted with mud. After her comes LAMBERT, attired in a light summer suit, long motor coat and motor cap. His expression can best be described as perturbed.

PEGGY PAT (*as she limps painfully into the room*). Oh — Dwight — I'll never elope with you again! If I had known that it was to be like *this*, I should not have promised you.

LAMBERT (*helping to R.*). Now — now — Peggy Pat. Don't you worry — it will soon be over.

PEGGY PAT (*sobbing on his shoulder*). Oh, you don't know that it will! I just feel that something is going to happen!

LAMBERT. Nothing can happen now — and just as soon as I fix that car, we'll ride right over that boundary line — and settle everything.

PEGGY PAT (*as they seat themselves*). I'm afraid —

LAMBERT. Afraid of what? You're with me.

PEGGY PAT. Yes — but dad is after us. That makes a difference.

LAMBERT. You don't know that he's after us.

PEGGY PAT. He saw me get in the car — and hand you the suit case. (*Wails.*) Oh, why did he come along that particular street just at that particular moment!

LAMBERT. He probably didn't think a thing about it.

PEGGY PAT. Oh, *didn't* he? Well, if he told mother, *she* would think a few things!

LAMBERT. Well, it won't take me long to regulate the car, so if you'll stay right here — and rest — (*kneels*) Here — off come the slippers — that'll help. (*Takes them off.*)

PEGGY PAT (*tearfully powdering her nose*). Oh, Dwight, such a looking bride as you'll have!

LAMBERT. The prettiest in the world.

PEGGY PAT. But not so pretty as if you'd waited for her until next Wednesday.

LAMBERT. Are you sorry — that I didn't?

PEGGY PAT. *Sorry?* Would I be here if I were sorry?

LAMBERT. Wouldn't you rather have just — ourselves — instead of all that mob?

PEGGY PAT (*putting her arms around his neck*). Oh, you know I should — you know it. I don't want anything in the world right now but you — I mean I don't want anything but to get married — but that's the same as you, isn't it? (*Hysterically.*) Oh, dear — I don't know what I want!

LAMBERT. Well, don't you worry — *I* know. (*Rises.*) And now — I'll be off.

PEGGY PAT (*wailing*). Oh, don't leave me — don't leave me —

LAMBERT. But I *must*, dear.

PEGGY PAT (*calming down*). Of course. I'm a silly

idiot. But hurry back — for I can't help being frightened.

LAMBERT. You bet I'll hurry. (*Rushes off.*)

PEGGY PAT, *left to herself*, looks nervously around, then walks to the front of the stage, takes off her hat and shakes the water from it. *Unseen by PEGGY PAT, SADIE appears at ticket window.*

PEGGY PAT (*to herself*). Something's going to happen — something's going to happen — oh, I know it. And I won't go back — I won't go back! (*Shakes the hat violently.*) Oh, dear — oh, dear — oh, dear! (*Her voice rises to a shriek.*)

SADIE. Sakes alive! It's worse than I thought it would be!

PEGGY PAT (*wheeling about*). What do you mean?

SADIE (*soothingly*). Nothing, dearie, nothing. Now don't get excited.

PEGGY PAT (*at window*). Who are you?

SADIE (*patting her shoulder*). Just a friend, dearie. Now — now — nobody's going to hurt you.

PEGGY PAT. Why should anybody hurt me?

SADIE. Don't you worry about that. (*To herself.*) Poor lamb!

PEGGY PAT. Why do you look at me so? (*Wildly.*) Has anything happened to him?

SADIE. Let's not talk about him.

PEGGY PAT. But we *will* talk about him. (*Desperately.*) Tell me.

SADIE. Tell you what?

PEGGY PAT. What you meant by looking as if you were sorry for me.

SADIE. Now I didn't mean a thing in the world.

PEGGY PAT. Yes — you did — and I'm going to see what's the matter. (*Starts toward door.*)

SADIE. He ain't out there, dearie.

PEGGY PAT. Then where is he? (*Weakly.*) They haven't caught him, have they?

SADIE. Now you mustn't think about him any more. It can't be helped — and —

PEGGY PAT. Who — what? Oh, you do talk so strangely!

SADIE (*to herself, nervously.*). Dear me! I wish he'd come!

PEGGY PAT (*excitedly*). Who's coming? Has — anybody — told — you — to — look — out — for — me?

SADIE. Not exactly that — but —

Enter LAMBERT

PEGGY PAT (*running to him*). Oh, Dwight — Dwight! She says such queer things to me!

LAMBERT (*soothingly*). Now — now —

PEGGY PAT. And she knows — *she knows*.

SADIE. I've been wondering about you, young man, and was beginning to get worried. (*Nods toward Peggy Pat.*) Did she break away?

LAMBERT. I don't believe I understand.

SADIE. You're in charge of her, ain't you?

LAMBERT (*confused*). Why — yes — if you want to put it that way.

SADIE. Taking the night train?

LAMBERT (*still more perplexed*). Well — not exactly.

SADIE. Well — they said you were.

PEGGY PAT. Who said?

SADIE. That fellow who passed through here yesterday.

LAMBERT. *What* fellow?

SADIE. See here, young man, do you think I don't know all about her?

LAMBERT (*defiantly*). There is nothing to know.

SADIE (*sarcastically*). Oh, is that so? Well — she's the crazy girl we're expecting from up country.

PEGGY PAT (*indignantly*). *Crazy!* Well, I never! *Crazy!* You're the crazy one!

LAMBERT. Hush! Come over here and put on your slippers. (*Leads her to R. and whispers as he holds the slippers for her.*) Don't you see that this is our chance to escape?

PEGGY PAT. No, I don't. The idea of calling me crazy!

LAMBERT. Listen, Peggy Pat. If anybody happens to follow and we are clever enough to manage this lunatic stunt — it means a get-away for us.

PEGGY PAT (*glaring at SADIE*). But how can we manage it?

LAMBERT. You pretend to be crazy.

PEGGY PAT. But I don't know how to be crazy.

LAMBERT. Act just as you've been acting all afternoon.

PEGGY PAT (*angrily*). Why, Dwight, what a perfectly horrid thing to say.

LAMBERT. I didn't mean — *that* — honest I didn't. (*As PEGGY PAT sobs hysterically.*) That's bully — keep it up. (*Strolls back to the window.*)

SADIE. You're pretty young to have charge of her, ain't you?

LAMBERT. Well — you see — she's in love with me — and —

SADIE. In love with you? Why I thought that her lover had died and that his death caused all this head trouble!

LAMBERT (*confused*). Oh, did he? I mean — well — she — in fact she thinks I'm the other man.

SADIE. Oh — I — see. Why on earth did they let her start out in that rig?

LAMBERT. She wanted to wear it — and it's best to humor them, you know.

PEGGY PAT (*weeping*). Oh, dear — Oh, dear — *Oh, dear!* I won't go back — I won't go back!

SADIE (*looking sympathetically at Peggy Pat*). Sad, ain't it? (*Bell rings.*) That's long distance, I suppose. (*Disappears.*)

PEGGY PAT (*going to Lambert*). Did I do that all right?

LAMBERT. Bully!

SADIE *re-appears*

SADIE. Don't mind if I put down the window, do you? I can't hear. (*Pulls down the window.*)

LAMBERT. Now we'll beat it. Put on your hat — and before you know it, we'll be across that state line.

PEGGY PAT *has just adjusted her dejected hat and has drawn her coat together, when the door opens and Ruth followed by Lansing enters.*

RUTH (*in amazement*). Dwight! Peggy Pat! What are you doing here? (*Lansing crosses, back of stage to R. and stands apart.*)

PEGGY PAT. What are you doing here?

RUTH. I'm on my way to Jean's for a week-end.

PEGGY PAT (*defiantly*). Well — we're eloping!

RUTH. Eloping! In those clothes?

PEGGY PAT. I can't help the clothes. Dwight had to take me when he could get me — and that was on my way to a luncheon.

RUTH. But what put it into your heads to elope?

LAMBERT. What put it in there? Why, *you*.

RUTH. *I*?

PEGGY PAT. Didn't you tell us that it was the only thing to do? You *did* — you know you did.

RUTH. But, my dear infants, you should have done it sooner. Your wedding invitations are out — your plans are made —

PEGGY PAT. And I just couldn't stand another party! So when mother said I must give a dinner to the bridesmaids, I broke down and told her that I'd scratch out their eyes if I had to look at them another time.

RUTH. Peggy Pat!

PEGGY PAT. Yes, I did — and then I said I'd elope — and —

RUTH. Yes?

PEGGY PAT. She raved, Ruth — yes, she *raved* — So Dwight and I decided that we'd do it — and we're not sorry — are we, Dwight?

LAMBERT (*as he puts his arms about her*). Sorry? Well, I guess not.

Enter JULIET and GRANT

JULIET. Good gracious! (*At a signal from LANSING, GRANT crosses back of stage to R. and joins him.*) What have we here?

RUTH. An elopement.

JULIET (*to RUTH*). I told you so — I told you so. Now you've done it, Ruth. (*To LAMBERT.*) Are you on the way or is the deed already done?

LAMBERT. We're on our way. And if this darned old car hadn't needed overhauling, we should have been married by this time. (*Pleadingly.*) You won't tell on us, will you, Ruth?

RUTH. Tell — whom?

PEGGY PAT. Dad. He saw me get into the car with a suit case and I know he's on our trail.

RUTH (*slowly*). I don't know that I approve —

LAMBERT. Ruth — Ruth! You wouldn't — you couldn't —

PEGGY PAT. And after you told us to do it!

RUTH (*laughingly*). Why, you dears, I wouldn't give you away for anything!

LAMBERT. Bully for you! Now we're off — and there isn't a single, solitary thing to keep us from dashing right over that dividing line!

And then — just as they are about to make a triumphal exit, SADIE enters — in great excitement and fairly bristling with importance.

SADIE (*striking a dramatic attitude*). Which of all this bunch is the elopers? (*For a moment there is no response — then RUTH and JULIET move to C. and LAMBERT with PEGGY PAT down L. Each looks hopelessly at the other.*) There's no use in trying to fool me — and there's no use in trying to get out of this. That long distance call was from a policeman and we're ordered to keep the two until the girl's father gets here.

LANSING. You can't keep people against their will.

SADIE. Oh, can't I? Well, you'll find out.

PEGGY PAT (*crossing to RUTH and drawing her aside*). Oh, Ruth — Ruth — save us — save us. You can — and you must — because it's your fault that we're eloping.

RUTH. How can I save you?

PEGGY PAT. Pretend that you're *me*. Give us a chance to slip out — and after that, you can easily explain. Promise, Ruth — oh, promise.

RUTH (*suddenly*). Of course I'll promise.

SADIE (*stepping to C.*). Well of all the modest outfit! Are you ashamed to acknowledge each other? Now — speak up.

RUTH. Well — I *will* speak up. I'm the culprit — I'm the eloper — I'm the object of your telephone communication. Now, what are you going to do about it?

(*In the midst of the excitement which follows, PEGGY PAT steals quietly back of stage and joins LAMBERT at door. They slip out, unobserved.*)

JULIET. *Ruth!* (*Crosses to GRANT.*)

SADIE. Going to do about it? Keep you right here until the old gentleman who's so hot after you, gets a chance to nab you. (*Pauses.*) Who's your partner?

LANSING (*strolling carelessly to RUTH's side*). Why, I am, of course. We've kept you guessing quite a while, haven't we?

SADIE. Not as much as you think. I had my suspicions the minute you asked for two tickets to Willowdene — though why you should be going *that* way instead of across the line, I don't know.

LANSING. If we prefer to be married at Willowdene, whose business is it?

SADIE. None of mine, I'm sure. And I don't mind saying that you're the oldest looking couple to be eloping that I ever saw. (*From outside comes the honk of a car.*) What's that?

GRANT. Wedding bells, I fancy. Too bad that we're obliged to turn the tables — and have the joke on you?

SADIE. What do you mean?

RUTH. That the two youngsters who have just escaped are the real culprits. We're only make-believe.

SADIE. That'll do to tell.

RUTH. But it's true — they're both my friends.

SADIE. Still, it don't go with me for I happen to know that the poor little girl is plumb crazy in her head — and the young fellow is taking her to the asylum.

JULIET. Oh — how — screamingly — funny!

LANSING. Did they own up to that?

SADIE. Of course they did. Think I'd be taking it on hearsay?

LANSING. Then they were pretty clever to put it over.

SADIE. Oh — *were* they? Well, I'm not accepting your word as to who they are and who they aren't. You're the ones who will have to be identified.

RUTH. You don't mean to say that you really believe we are the elopers — and that you'd dare to detain us here?

SADIE. Oh — *don't* I? Well — just to show you what I *do* mean — (*produces handcuffs which she has had hidden in her dress*). There! (*Snaps them on hand of each*.)

LANSING. This is an insult — ridiculous! Take off these things. (*From outside comes a train whistle*.)

JULIET. The local!

SADIE. Take them off? Not until that train pulls safely out. I've got to do my duty.

GRANT. But it's imperative that we all take that train.

SADIE (*laconically*). Sorry. (*Goes out*.)

GRANT (*to LANSING*). Look here — I can't leave you like this.

LANSING (*smiling*). Oh — yes you can.

JULIET (*to RUTH*). And Ruth — what am I to do?

RUTH. Do? You and Romeo are to go on as fast as that stupid train can carry you.

JULIET (*catching up her coat*). But — you —

RUTH. I'll be all right — Friday will see to that.

JULIET. And I'll see that Jean sends the very fastest car she has —

RUTH. For both of us. By that time we shall probably be acquitted.

LANSING. So you know that we, too, are on our way to Willowdene.

RUTH. Of course. Everybody knows — or ought to know — by this time that we all have one objective point. Jule, explain everything to Romeo — and for pity's sake, don't miss the train. Now — hurry.

GRANT (*who has taken JULIET's bag and his own*). Ready? (*Shaking LANSING's free hand*.) Good-bye, old fellow — never thought to see you in handcuffs.

LANSING (*sharply*). Don't stop for that.

GRANT. And I hate to leave you. (*As he reaches door*.) In fact — using the words of the immortal Montague "Parting is such sweet sorrow."

LANSING. Get out!

JULIET (*as she and GRANT hurry out of the room*). Till later, then. Good-bye.

(*For a moment there is absolute silence — then the train shrieks its farewell — and the whistle dies away. RUTH and LANSING look helplessly at each other and at their handcuffed hands*.)

LANSING (*laughing*). I hope you're in no particular rush.

RUTH. For once in my life — I'm not.

CURTAIN

RUTH IN A RUSH

THE THIRD ACT

SCENE: *Same as Act II. The stage grows gradually darker, although never dark enough to obscure the characters.*

Curtain rises upon SADIE removing the handcuffs from RUTH and LANSING who are seated at R. RUTH's hat is off, her face is flushed and smiling, and she gives no evidence of fatigue or discomfort. LANSING is equally gay and only SADIE adds a touch of gloom to the scene. She gives the impression of being officially misunderstood and yet properly apologetic — and takes off the handcuffs half reluctantly.

SADIE. You ain't blaming me too much, are you?

LANSING. We're not blaming you at all. Devotion to one's duty — even in the face of obstacles — is more than praiseworthy — it's sublime.

SADIE. Don't talk slush.

RUTH. And I'll always be indebted to you for an experience — a real experience — and a sure enough adventure.

SADIE. I don't see where the adventure comes in.

RUTH. You *don't*? Not everybody has the opportunity to wear handcuffs.

SADIE. That's because it ain't a popular opportunity.

RUTH. Why — even jail becomes alluring (*laughingly*) — if I can take along my side-partner.

LANSING. Comrades in crime! Don't tempt me, Ruth.

RUTH. Wouldn't we sound well in print! "Un-

known pair in Sunshine Junction refuse to reveal identity — aid in the escape of an eloping couple — and are arrested and handcuffed! The cross in the accompanying photograph shows the place where the tragedy occurred."

LANSING. Don't forget the scene with the Irate Parent. I never hope to see a madder man than he when he discovered you in the place of his wayward daughter.

RUTH. Which leads me to believe that whatever affection he has had for me is now a thing of the past.

SADIE. Do you think he'll catch up with them?

RUTH. Never in the world. Love laughs at pursuers — as well as at locksmiths — especially when love has the start.

LANSING. I watched the departure of the Parent — and he headed his car — not for the borderline but for home. Down in his heart I believe he is glad his daughter has possessed courage enough to defy convention.

RUTH. I hope so. The wrong sort of convention ought to be defied.

SADIE. What do you mean?

RUTH. Oh, the silly round of parties — the avalanche of trousseau — the showy wedding — and —

SADIE (*breathlessly*). You don't mean to say that she gave up all these things — just to elope with that fellow?

RUTH. Why not?

SADIE (*in great disgust*). Then she *is* nutty.

RUTH. Every reformer falls heir to that criticism, I believe.

SADIE. And if I hadn't just heard that the crazy pair are to arrive tomorrow, I'd still think she was that poor, silly young thing. (*Walks to C.*)

RUTH. Naturally.

SADIE. Honest to goodness — when I saw her walking around in her stocking feet and waving that big hat and talking to herself — well — (*pauses*) — now see here — wouldn't you have thought she was the lunatic?

LANSING. Undoubtedly.

SADIE. It ain't often that I'm taken in — and it kind-a-hurts my pride to be fooled twice in succession all on one afternoon.

RUTH. I shouldn't look at it that way. We were to blame for the first misunderstanding — and as to the elopers —

SADIE. They would have fooled anybody. (*Reflectively.*) You just ought to have seen that silly girl.

RUTH. But love makes us all silly — and you must remember that poor Peggy Pat had a father on her trail.

SADIE. And he ought to have caught her. Weak-minded people ain't got a right to be roaming round and scaring other people into fits.

LANSING. There's one thing your friend failed to utter, Ruth.

RUTH. Really? I thought his vocabulary unusually complete.

LANSING. Your name.

RUTH. He has always been so much of a family friend that — fortunately for me — he thinks of me only in the terms of Ruth. (*Laughingly.*) Sorry!

SADIE (*to LANSING*). Do you mean to say that you don't know what her last name is?

LANSING. That very thing. (*Gaily.*) But what matter? In years agone I was Paris to her Helen, Antony to her Cleopatra —

RUTH. And Ananias to her Sapphira!

SADIE. Look here, Mr. Writer-man, your talk sounds queer to me. (*Suspiciously.*) You don't happen to have anything in that suit case that — (*hesitates*).

LANSING. Not a bit of it. I have drunk of a deeper draught than you can comprehend, Miss Sodastrom.

RUTH (*with sudden interest*). What made you call him Writer-man?

SADIE. Just because he says he is. Strikes me that you two know mighty little about each other to be so friendly like.

RUTH (*to LANSING*). Do you write?

LANSING (*jokingly*). Advertisements.

SADIE (*in a relieved tone*). So that's what you mean by wanting local color! (*Turns.*) Well — I'm going.

RUTH. Please don't. We might escape.

SADIE (*at door*). That's nothing to me, now. (*Pauses.*) Say, I don't blame you for being sore at me for causing you all this trouble.

RUTH. Trouble? It doesn't look like trouble to me.

LANSING. Trouble? There is no such thing in all the world.

SADIE (*disapprovingly*). There you go again. (*Pauses.*) Well, if you want anything —

RUTH (*blithely*). We won't.

SADIE. Or if your friends don't call for you —

LANSING. They will (*sighs*) — alas!

SADIE. You'll find me —

LANSING. In the first house across the road? Exactly.

SADIE (*despondently*). I ain't much good as a detective or a sheriff I'm thinking — and I apologize — honest I do. (*Exit.*)

RUTH (*glancing at her watch*). I'm sure they are

at Willowdene by this time — so we may expect the relief ambulance as soon as the news is broken to — (*hesitates*).

LANSING (*eagerly*). Yes?

RUTH. My hostess. (*As he sighs.*) What's the matter?

LANSING. I was afraid you were going to say — *my sister*.

RUTH. Well — what if I had?

LANSING. You would have pricked my soapbubble of rainbow hues.

RUTH. But — why?

LANSING. Because I wish to think of you as — Ruth — not as the heiress.

RUTH. What difference does it make?

LANSING. The difference between an appalling and barrierlike bank account and — *you*.

RUTH. But she can't help her money.

LANSING. Of course she can't. She is very charming and very talented, no doubt — but she isn't — *you*. Do you notice, Ruth, how all my dissertations seem to center upon the pronoun of the second person?

RUTH. Then isn't it time for each of us to discuss this second person — rather thoroughly?

LANSING. Why not?

RUTH. What do you know of the heiress — as you call her?

LANSING. Nothing. Mrs. Foster's charming note of invitation informed us that the other guests would be her sister — and a friend.

RUTH. Do you know anything about the sister?

LANSING. Nothing — except her name. Romeo furnished that bit of information. So you may readily see why I hoped that the Irate Parent would address

you in formal style and tell me what I wanted to know.

RUTH (*after a moment*). Don't call your friend Romeo. What is his real name?

LANSING. Philip Grant.

RUTH. Is he the millionaire?

LANSING. Now what do you know about the millionaire?

RUTH. Well — *my* note of invitation informed me that the other guests would be a millionaire — and a somebody designated as *distinguished*.

LANSING. No names?

RUTH. No names.

LANSING. What makes you think that Phil is the millionaire?

RUTH. I don't say that I think he *is*. I am asking for information.

LANSING. Do you want him to be?

RUTH. What a question! I much prefer to know if you're the distinguished one.

LANSING. That adjective hardly belongs to me — but I'm not the millionaire — if that helps any.

RUTH. Oh, I've hoped all along that you weren't — and then when that girl called you Writer-man, I just knew. (*Eagerly*.) Do you write? *Really* write?

LANSING. I make my living in that way.

RUTH. And — *what* do you write?

LANSING. An essay here — a story there — and sometimes a novel.

RUTH. *Oh!*

LANSING. And I'm eternally and everlastingly evolving the characters who trip in and out of my pages.

RUTH. Oh — how splendid!

LANSING. Shall I tell you of the one who is always with me?

RUTH. Please.

LANSING. She isn't only a book lady — she's a companion — and when the others fade away, she stays. She smiles at me from the other side of my camp fire; she's sweetly serious when I am working at my desk — and she always understands my mood. She's a real friend — a real comrade.

RUTH. You must have modeled her after some one whom you know — intimately.

LANSING. On the other hand, I've been looking for her all my life. And today — I found her.

RUTH (*quickly*). In the storm, I suppose. Did she wear a gown of grayish mist, carry a quiver of silver rain-shafts and leave a rainbow in her wake?

LANSING. I'm not so sure of the grayish mist — nor of the silver rain-shafts — but I can answer for the rainbow.

RUTH (*rising*). How we are digressing from the original subject! (*Comes down R.*) Since I am eliminated from the heiress class, I must be, according to your logic, the other one. How was she described?

LANSING. As — a friend. (*Follows her.*)

RUTH. Hopelessly in the background, isn't she?

LANSING. Not to me. (*Stands back of her.*)

RUTH. And colorlessly commonplace when contrasted with the glitter of Juliet's perfectly good dollars?

LANSING (*sharply*). Don't be foolish.

RUTH. What will you say when I reveal the fact that I'm merely — a secretary?

LANSING. A secretary to the heiress?

RUTH. She doesn't need one. (*Pauses.*) I'm engaged by a really big man.

LANSING. Look here, Ruth — did you say *by* or *to*?

RUTH. By — of course. (*As he remains silent.*) What's the matter?

LANSING. I'm just getting my breath. Heart slipped a cog over that engaged business.

RUTH. You're not only getting personal, Friday — but silly.

LANSING. Well — who is this really big man?

RUTH. He's a writer, too.

LANSING. Lucky dog to get you. (*Suddenly.*) You wouldn't throw him over for another job, would you?

RUTH. Throw over Gilbert Lansing?

(*For a moment, LANSING's face is a study. Surprise, incredulity, and consternation succeed each other. He finally speaks — with an effort.*)

LANSING. What — did — you — say?

RUTH. I suppose you *are* surprised.

LANSING. *Surprised?* I'm speechless.

RUTH. That isn't much of a compliment to me.

LANSING. Perhaps I don't fully understand.

RUTH. Understand? There's nothing to understand. I have been engaged as Gilbert Lansing's private secretary and am to report the first of the month.

LANSING. Then you are Ruth MacDonald.

RUTH (*wheeling around*). How do you know my name?

LANSING (*walking to L.*). Because — because — I happen to be a friend of Gilbert Lansing.

RUTH (*enthusiastically*). Of course you'd be a friend — another writer! And he told you about me?

LANSING. How else could I know?

RUTH. It's quite wonderful! (*Crosses to L. and draws LANSING to back of stage where they seat them-*

selves.) Now you must answer a thousand questions and tell me all about him. First — is he so very old?

LANSING (*hesitating*). He's — he's — well, he has retained all his faculties.

RUTH. Don't joke. I'm in earnest.

LANSING. He's gray-headed — but — but — well, his heart is young.

RUTH. I know now just what to expect. You said that in the same spirit that one woman describes another as well-meaning.

LANSING. Oh — come now —

RUTH. Is he — unattractive?

LANSING. No — I shouldn't call him that.

RUTH. Disagreeable?

LANSING. Oh — he has moods, of course —

RUTH. Literary temperament, I suppose. (*Pauses.*) I shall not like the man.

LANSING. Oh, don't say *that*.

RUTH. But I just *feel* it.

LANSING (*impulsively*). But you *will* like him — you've got to like him —

RUTH. No such thing.

LANSING (*seizing her hands*). But I tell you that you *will!*

RUTH (*drawing her hands away*). Why do you speak in such a way?

LANSING. Because — because — (*leans toward her*). Why, Ruth, — I'm — I'm —

(*And just then a long and lusty wail of a motor horn brings them to their feet.*)

RUTH. What's that?

LANSING. They've come after us — hang the luck!

RUTH. Oh — do you think so? (*Impulsively*

grasps his arm.) Let's not go. (Another blast of the horn — and she goes to the door, opens it and peeps out cautiously.)

LAMBERT (*from off stage*). Hi, there, Ruth! Are you still here?

RUTH. Very much here. We missed the local — all on account of you two.

LAMBERT (*cheerfully*). Too bad. Let me introduce you to my wife.

RUTH. Oh, Dwight — have you really gone and done it? (*Turns to LANSING.*) Come here — it's the bride and groom. (*He joins her at door.*)

LAMBERT. Well — I should say so. Nothing can scare us up now.

PEGGY PAT (*weakly, off stage*). Ruth — did dad come?

RUTH. He came — he saw — he exploded.

LAMBERT. I bet he did.

PEGGY PAT. Is he following?

LANSING. Not a bit of it. He's headed for home — so there'll probably be a light in the window for you.

LAMBERT. There'll be something else waiting for us all right, all right. So we're not going home.

RUTH. Where else can Peggy go — in those clothes?

LAMBERT. To the nearest hotel. Then she can buy what she needs.

RUTH. *Buy?* That would be positively sinful with a whole trousseau going to waste.

PEGGY PAT (*complacently*). Well — that isn't my fault.

RUTH. Then, whose is it?

PEGGY PAT. Why, yours, Ruth. You proposed our eloping, you know.

RUTH. *Proposed?* I did nothing of the kind.

PEGGY PAT. Well, you were responsible, just the same.

RUTH. I never heard of such ingratitude.
(*Pauses.*) Well — are you sorry that you did it?

PEGGY PAT (*in an aggrieved tone*). Sorry? Why, Ruth, how can you say such a thing?

RUTH. Then, remember, Peggy Pat, that if it hadn't been for me, you would have been ignominiously dragged home.

LANSING. And if it hadn't been for me, young man, you'd be laughing on the other side of your mouth.

LAMBERT. Bully of you to help me out, old chap, and I'll do the same for you, some day, when you find the right girl and want to get over the border line.
(*Sounds horn.*) Good-bye — we're off!

(RUTH and LANSING close the door, and walk slowly to R. where they seat themselves. The sound of the motor horn dies away.)

RUTH. Talk about the irresponsibility of youth! The calm forgetfulness of that pair makes me rather cross.

LANSING (*thoughtfully*). And yet I'd give a good deal to lose a few years — and to be in that young fellow's place.

RUTH (*teasingly*). Dear me! Did Peggy Pat make such a conquest as all that? You should see her properly clothed and in her right mind.

LANSING. I don't mean that — and you know it. I was wishing that I, too, might find the only girl in the world and ride with her straight into the land of happiness.

RUTH. Then — why not?

LANSING. Because I'm past the age when I can trust to the impulse of the moment — when I can defy fate, disregard the future, and dash away every obstacle that threatens.

RUTH. But some of the greatest things in the world are done — in a rush.

LANSING. Do you believe in that theory?

RUTH. I'm afraid I do.

LANSING. When convention — and the world — say — *wait*?

RUTH. There's a glorious satisfaction in refusing to wait — in being swept off your feet — in doing the unusual and the unexpected.

LANSING. Do you really feel that way about it?

RUTH. So strongly, that I'd rather crowd into one breathless, divine moment what logically belongs to a period of discretion.

LANSING (*after a pause*). I didn't suppose that in all the world there was another person who thought — just as I think.

RUTH (*whimsically*). And you found her in a little two-by-four waiting room in an obscure little junction by the side of the main road.

LANSING. Did I also find her friendship?

RUTH. Of course. Doesn't our theory prove itself in the fact that we've gained in a few hours what weeks of acquaintance in a stiff drawing room might have failed to accomplish?

LANSING. Friendship, Ruth, is one of the greatest things in the world.

RUTH. And freedom. Freedom to plan one's life in a wise, sane fashion.

LANSING. Would such a freedom be broad enough to

carry you over the border line—with the man you loved?

RUTH. It would.

LANSING. Even if he were not a friend—of long, long standing?

RUTH (*after a pause*). The fairies at my cradle gave me a great gift, Friday—the promise that I should know my—lover—the moment, the very moment that I should first meet him.

LANSING (*leaning toward her*). If—to friendship—and to freedom—we should add—love—What then, Ruth? What—

And then, without warning, the window flies up, SADIE leans out and SADIE's shrill voice shouts "Need anything?"

LANSING (*rising and walking to front of stage*). Great Heavens, no! We'll call, if we do.

SADIE. It's so cloudy that it's getting dark all of a sudden. Want a light?

RUTH. No—thank you.

SADIE. I thought maybe you'd like one since you didn't know each other any better.

RUTH. Many thanks—but our car will soon be here. So we'll be duly chaperoned.

LANSING (*turning*). Thanks also—for your interest.

SADIE (*pertly*). You're welcome.

LANSING. And would you mind shutting the window? It creates—a draft.

SADIE. Just as you say. (*Slams down the window.*)

RUTH (*laughingly*). Now there's a character study for you, Writer-man. Use her in your next story.

LANSING (*at C.*). I'm not in a literary frame of mind at present — so don't call me Writer-man.

RUTH. But what *is* your real name?

LANSING. Don't ask me.

RUTH. I don't intend to — since it will be much more fun not to know until we are properly introduced at Willowdene.

LANSING (*walking to and fro*). This Sunshine Junction adventure *would* work up pretty well — come to think about it.

RUTH. It would be — corking. If *you* don't use it, I shall.

LANSING. *What?* Are you a writer?

RUTH. I try it — occasionally. (*As LANSING walks to front of stage.*) What's the matter, Friday? Don't you like literary women?

LANSING. I refuse to think of *you* as such.

RUTH. Why? It's my great ambition.

LANSING (*turning*). Have you talent?

RUTH. A little, I think.

LANSING. Does writing mean — everything — to you?

RUTH. Not — everything.

LANSING. Can you live without it?

RUTH. Easily.

LANSING. Then give it up.

RUTH. Don't be so grouchy about it. And why should I give it up?

LANSING (*sitting by her*). Because I haven't much faith in women's ability to interpret life through the medium of literature.

RUTH. How unfair — and what right have you to make such a statement?

LANSING. The right that experience gives. Nine-

tenths of the manuscripts which come my way give such an unnatural, distorted idea of everyday existence that they take my breath.

RUTH. Then you're a critic?

LANSING. Unfortunately — I'm the editor of a magazine.

RUTH (*startled*). Editor?

LANSING. Yes, Don't you think that I look like one?

RUTH. Which magazine?

LANSING (*carelessly*). What matter? (*Pauses.*) Women insist upon writing about things they do not understand — instead of endeavoring to portray everyday incidents, everyday people and everyday emotions. Why not long ago a manuscript came to me — (*Suddenly.*) But I must be boring you.

RUTH. Go on. Please go on.

LANSING. A manuscript — well-written, rhetorically perfect — but giving a false philosophy and presenting characters so foreign to those whom we meet and know and love that — I laughed.

RUTH (*eagerly*). Yes?

LANSING. The heroine, for example,— a queer, exotic creature possessing no definite feminine charm and blessed with the execrable name of Leona —

RUTH (*startled*). Leona?

LANSING. Yes. (*As he observes her agitation.*) What's the matter?

RUTH. Leona is a very pretty name.

LANSING. Oh, no, it isn't. When one might use sweet, wholesome names like Mary — Jane — (*softly*) — or Ruth.

RUTH. Tell me some more about Leona.

LANSING. The author made a pathetic attempt to

have her a mystery — not only to men but to women.

RUTH (*airily*). How foolish! A woman may be a mystery to a man — but never to another woman.

LANSING (*in surprise*). Why you've said just what I was about to say!

RUTH. What of the hero?

LANSING. The *hero*? Don't dignify him with such a title!

RUTH. I suppose that he was so poorly delineated that he might have been a United States senator, a patent medicine agitator or the floor walker in some department store.

LANSING (*puzzled*). Why — yes — exactly.

RUTH. And was there a villain?

LANSING. A regular dyed-in-the-wool villain —

RUTH. Whose wife was doubtless restored to him at the sacrifice of his fortune.

LANSING. How did *you* know?

RUTH. Intuition. And the average man would rather lose a dozen wives than a dozen dollars. Wouldn't he?

LANSING (*excitedly*). Where did you get that phrase?

RUTH. And how does the story end?

LANSING. In a ridiculously tragic way.

RUTH. By the heroine's jumping off a precipice?

LANSING (*as he begins to understand*). Look here — Ruth —

RUTH (*excitedly*). And any sensible writer knows that the average reader doesn't care what happens to the hero and the heroine just so long as they are clasped in each other's arms when the story ends.

LANSING (*rising*). Ruth!

RUTH (*breathlessly*). For in popular literature,

only villains die — and unfortunate husbands whose wives are in love with other men. Otherwise, it's hard upon the digestion.

LANSING. You — wrote — that — story.

RUTH (*rising*). Of course I did. And you are Gilbert Lansing.

LANSING. Of course I'm Gilbert Lansing. (*With outstretched hands.*) Aren't you glad I'm not old — and crotchety — and — disagreeable?

RUTH (*walking to front of stage*). I — hate — you.

LANSING. Ruth!

RUTH (*turning*). Why shouldn't I — when you took my poor little story — and tore it into tatters.

LANSING. But I didn't know that it was your story. The name appended —

RUTH. Was naturally not that of Ruth MacDonald.

LANSING (*at C.*). Great heavens, Ruth! If I had realized —

RUTH. But you didn't — And if I had known —

LANSING. But you didn't. (*Smilingly.*) So let's call it square and celebrate the formal introduction of Ruth MacDonald and Gilbert Lansing.

RUTH (*stamping her foot*). Never.

LANSING. But, Ruth,— if you had realized my absolute joy when I discovered you to be my private secretary —

RUTH (*interrupting*). But I'm not your secretary — I'll never be.

LANSING. Don't say that.

RUTH. I mean it.

LANSING. My mistake was a natural one. I'm sorry.

RUTH. But why didn't you tell me that you were Gilbert Lansing?

LANSING. Wasn't it a justifiable temptation — to wait?

RUTH. It was not kind. It made me ridiculous.

LANSING. You couldn't be ridiculous.

RUTH. And I'll never forgive you.

LANSING. Please don't let our friendship end this way.

RUTH. Our *friendship*? You mean our acquaintance. That, Mr. Lansing, will doubtless begin — and end — at Willowdene.

And at this moment, JEAN MOORE FOSTER enters, wearing a long motor coat over an elaborate dinner gown and shrouded in a motor veil. She is of attractive personality, fashionable in the extreme — and is now goaded into unusual excitement and agitation. She throws back her veil, crosses to RUTH and embraces her in a perfunctory manner.

JEAN. Ruth MacDonald Moore!

LANSING (*in surprise*). Moore!

JEAN (*crossing to him*). Mr. Lansing, I am your hostess, Mrs. Foster, and I am deeply chagrined to think that you have had this long and tiresome wait when a telephone message would have brought our car to you.

LANSING (*as he takes her outstretched hand*). It has been anything but a tiresome wait, Mrs. Foster.

JEAN. But it seems so inhospitable.

LANSING. Hardly that. You must remember that Mr. Grant's lack of gasoline is really the cause of our delay. (*Motioning to RUTH.*) Won't you introduce us?

JEAN. *Introduce* you? Haven't you been together all afternoon?

LANSING. But we have been — unidentified — so to speak.

JEAN (*sharply*). How foolish of you, Ruth. Why didn't you tell your name? (*To LANSING.*) My sister, Miss Moore, Mr. Lansing.

LANSING (*acknowledging the introduction*). And now, Miss Moore, it is possible for us to begin our acquaintance formally and conventionally — at Willowdene. (*To JEAN.*) Shall I precede you to the car, Mrs. Foster, and stow away the baggage? (*Takes RUTH's bag, umbrella and his own suit case.*)

JEAN. If you will. (*As he goes out.*) Ruth — do you know who that is?

RUTH. Of course I know.

JEAN. But do you know that he is a very distinguished author?

RUTH (*impatiently*). Oh, Jean — Jean — give me credit for average intelligence.

JEAN. You've said something to him that you shouldn't.

RUTH. I have not.

JEAN. His expression shows it. (*Goes to her.*) Oh, Ruth, Ruth, why won't you be like other girls?

RUTH. This isn't a very pleasant welcome, Jean. Nor do I understand how you know what I've been saying and what I've been doing.

JEAN. From what Juliet tells me I know that it's all been very unconventional.

RUTH. Nothing of the sort. We four have been killing time in a very satisfactory manner — and have chosen to withhold our names. That's all there is to it.

JEAN. Then what does Juliet mean by this absurd

name of Romeo? (*Wails.*) And — oh, Ruth — why weren't you the one to captivate Mr. Grant?

RUTH. So that's what the matter, is it? And how do you know that I haven't captivated him?

JEAN. I'm not so blind that I can't perceive the obvious. Coming down from Willowdene — well, if he and Juliet are not already engaged they soon will be.

RUTH (*in surprise*). Coming down? Did *they* come back with you?

JEAN. Indeed they did. Bringing gasoline for that stranded car.

RUTH (*smiling to herself*). Pretty work, Jule!

JEAN. Why didn't you let me send the car for you in the first place?

RUTH. The roads were bad.

JEAN. And what of that?

RUTH. And there was a train.

JEAN. But there wasn't a train as it happened.

RUTH. Oh, yes, there was. Circumstances prevented me from making use of it — that's all.

JEAN. And very peculiar circumstances, I fear. Juliet was rather non-committal but I gathered from her sketchy account of things that you dragged poor Mr. Lansing into the ridiculous and embarrassing position of your fiancé.

RUTH. Not exactly that. We helped out Peggy Pat and Dwight — that's all.

JEAN. But what must he think of you?

RUTH. I haven't asked him — nor do I care.

JEAN. Were you really — handcuffed?

RUTH. Temporarily. And handcuffed — together.

JEAN. Disgusting!

RUTH. He didn't seem to think so. In fact, we both enjoyed it..

JEAN. Whatever interest the man might have had in you has probably been destroyed by your lack of convention.

RUTH. Then that is my own affair, is it not? Or did you invite me Jean, merely for the purpose of annexing a husband?

JEAN. Don't express yourself in that vulgar way.

RUTH. Well — did you?

JEAN (*with dignity*). I consider it an advantage for any girl to know Gilbert Lansing and Philip Grant.

Enter JULIET hurriedly and unceremoniously. She slams the door, stands with her back against it and speaks breathlessly.

JULIET. What is the matter with Friday?

JEAN. *Friday?* Ruth, do you mean to say that you dare to call Mr. Lansing *Friday*?

RUTH. I certainly do. And from this time on, he becomes Friday the thirteenth.

JULIET. He looks unlucky enough as it is.

JEAN. I don't understand your foolishness — and I propose that we hurry home.

JULIET (*crossing to RUTH*). Just a moment with Ruth, Jean.

JEAN. Then don't linger. Dinner has waited sufficiently long as it is. (*Exit.*)

JULIET. Is the trouble on account of his being Gilbert Lansing?

RUTH. Partly. He ridiculed my manuscript, you remember.

JULIET. It needed it.

RUTH. That may be. But what he said hurt just the same.

JULIET. You're not a good sport.

RUTH. Perhaps not.

JULIET. Did you tell him that you were his secretary?

RUTH. I did.

JULIET. And then did he tell you his name?

RUTH. He did not.

JULIET. Then how did you discover his identity?

RUTH. I guessed it. For he began to make fun of that very manuscript that I had sent him.

JULIET. But he didn't know that you were the author.

RUTH. No — but —

JULIET. You're a goose — and you've got to apologize.

RUTH (*slyly*). I've about decided to turn my attention to the other one.

JULIET. What?

RUTH. To — Philip Grant — as I believe he's called.

JULIET. You don't mean that, do you?

RUTH. Why not?

JULIET. Because — my dear — I'm afraid you're too late.

RUTH (*shaking her*). Oh, Jule, you funny old thing!

JULIET. I'm not funny — I'm just happy.

RUTH. But he's a millionaire.

JULIET. To use your own words, Ruth — I don't care if he's a rag-picker.

RUTH. And to use yours to me — a noble but peculiar sentiment, my dear.

JULIET. Don't persist in this foolish quarrel with Mr. Lansing, Ruth. Promise me.

RUTH. He may be the one to persist. You see, I didn't tell him that I was — well — myself.

JULIET. Then let me send him to you before we start.

RUTH. I'm not so sure that it's wise.

JULIET. Please — please. (*Coaxingly.*) Oh — please.

RUTH (*after a moment*). Then — just as you say. (*Pauses.*) And hurry!

JULIET (*laughing as she runs to the door*). Of course I'll hurry. (*Goes out and then opens door again.*) Go thou and do likewise!

In a moment the door opens and LANSING appears.

LANSING (*at door, holding out his hands*). Ruth!

RUTH (*meeting him at C. and taking his hands*). Will you forgive me?

LANSING. Forgive you — Heavens — I was the brute.

RUTH. But you didn't know — and anyway (*sighs*) — I can't write.

LANSING. But you *can* write — and we'll do it together.

RUTH. Together?

LANSING. Aren't you my secretary?

RUTH. Even if I am the heiress?

LANSING. Even so.

RUTH. I can't help my money, Friday.

LANSING. And I'm not thinking of your ridiculous old money. Oh, Ruth — all that really matters is — you.

RUTH (*softly*). And — you.

LANSING (*as he puts his arms around her*). Do you still feel that — sometime — you can ride over the borderline — with the man you love?

RUTH. Yes — oh, yes.

LANSING. And will you go — with me?

RUTH. With nobody else.

LANSING. Soon?

RUTH (*laughing*). Oh, Friday, Friday — Haven't you found out by this time that I'm always — in a rush?

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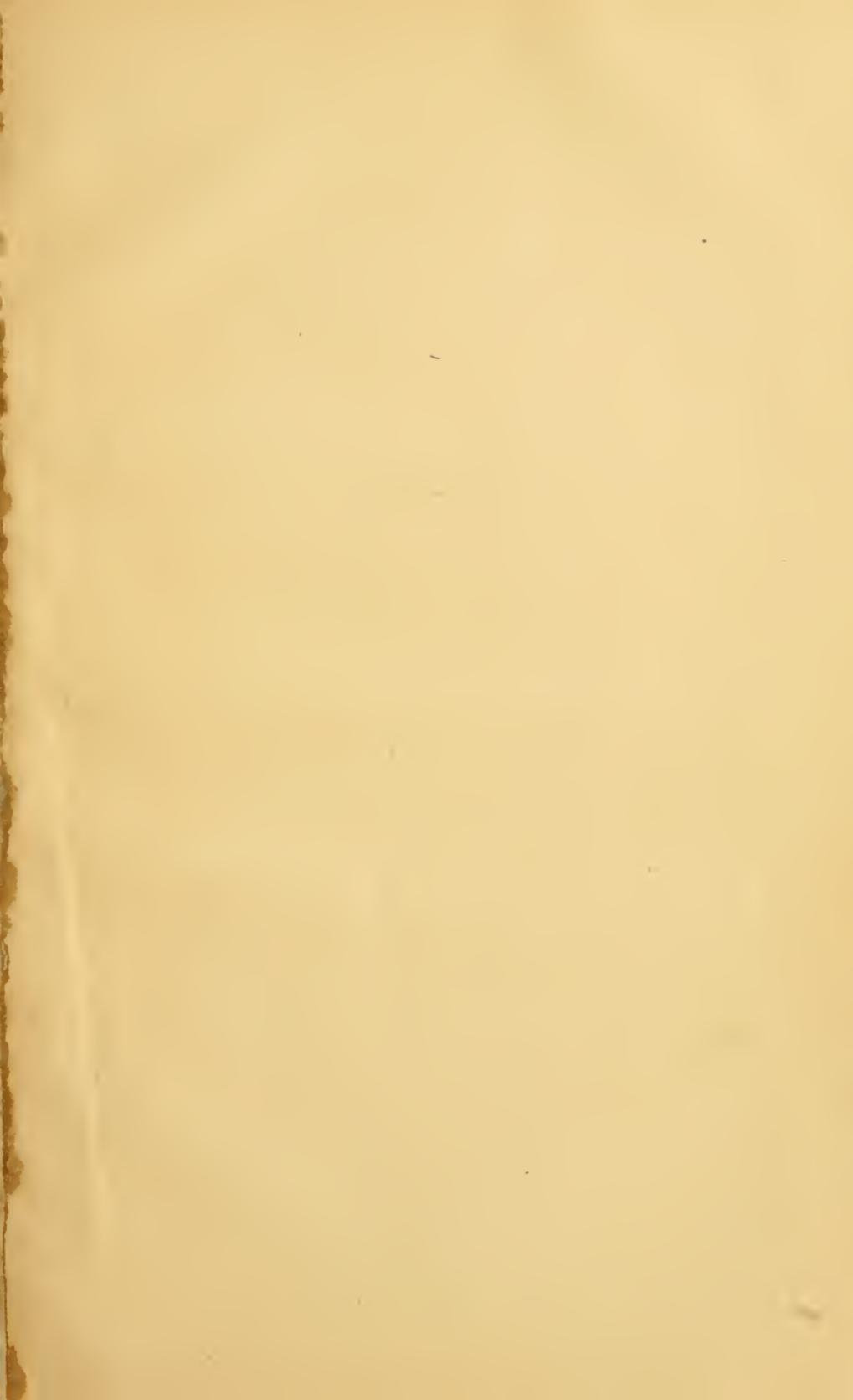
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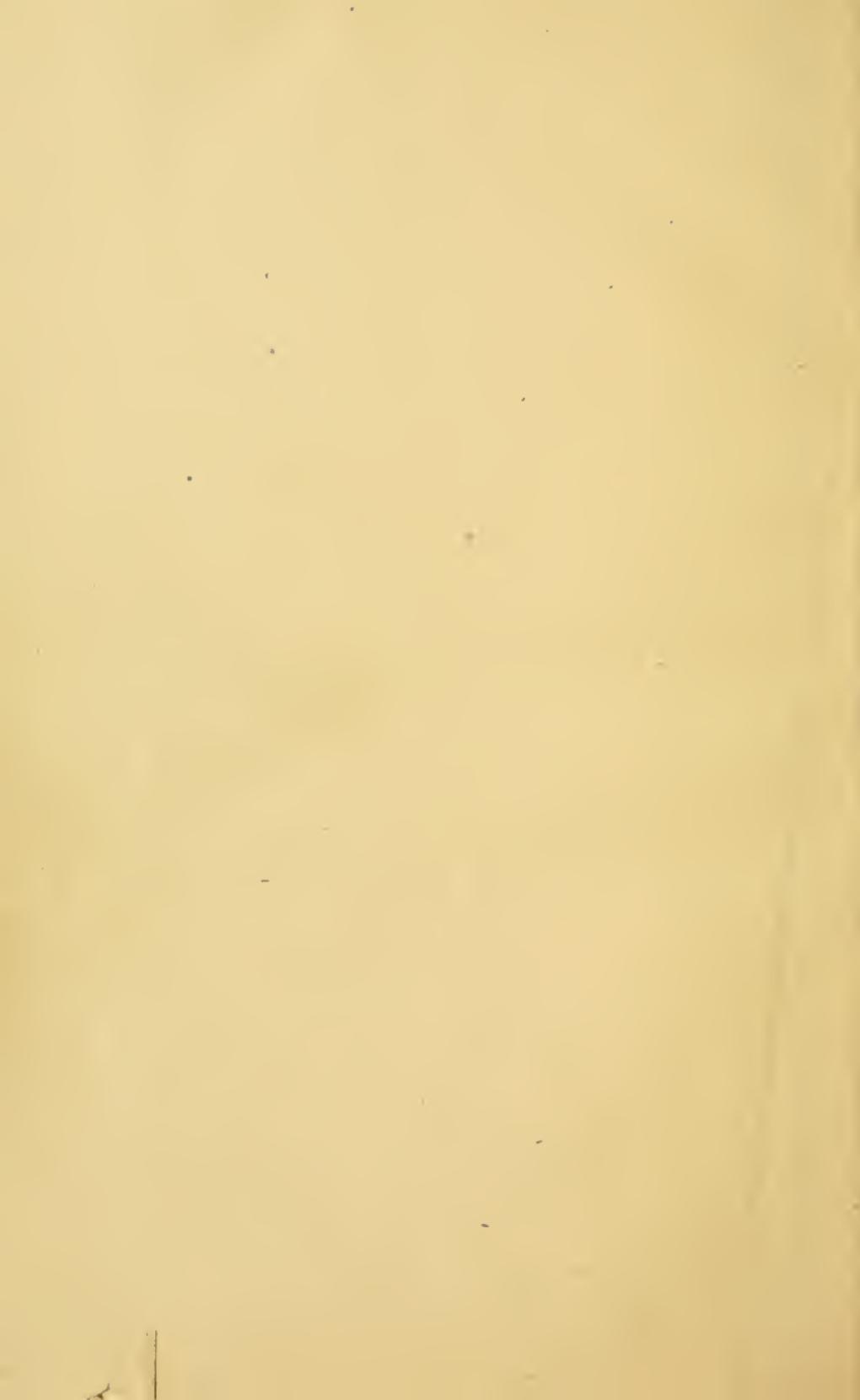
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